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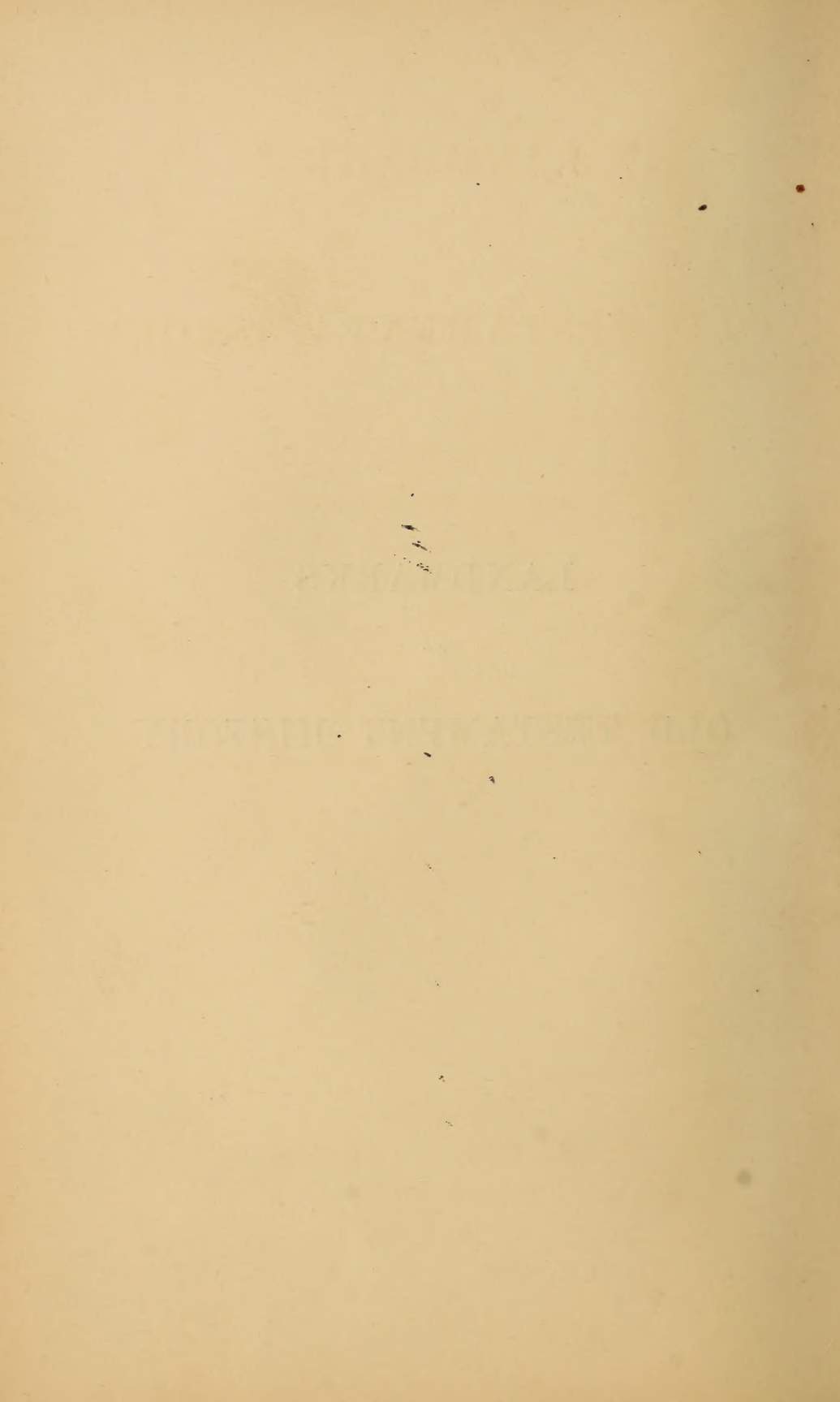
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LANDMARKS
OF
OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY



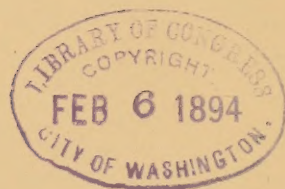
LANDMARKS
OF
OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

SAMUEL TO MALACHI

BY

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AUTHOR OF "LIFE AND WORDS OF CHRIST," "HOURS WITH THE BIBLE," ETC.



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PREFACE.

THIS volume consists, for the most part, of articles which have appeared in the *Sunday School Times* of Philadelphia, the kindness of the proprietors allowing me to reproduce them in the present form. A number of extra papers have, however, been added by me to make the whole more complete.

As a succession of brief, vivid pictures of Old Testament life so perennially interesting, I trust it may give pleasure to large numbers.

CUNNINGHAM GEIKIE.

FEBRUARY, 1894.

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LANDMARKS

OF

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY.

BIRTH AND YOUTH OF SAMUEL.

THE birth of Samuel marks a decisive point in the history of Israel, for in his lifetime and by his action, the old system of tribal government, which had lasted, under the "Judges," for at least two hundred years, gave place to monarchy, while his long and splendid services as a reformer rekindled the religious spirit in the nation. His wise and far-sighted institution of seminaries for the training of prophets, or, as we say, religious teachers, provided, moreover, a permanent source of healthy moral influence, and also a succession of fearless tribunes of the people, to stand, on the one hand, between them and the despotism of the throne, and on the other, between their higher religious aspirations and the deadening formality of the merely ritual worship supplied by the priesthood. His father was one Elkanah, of Ramathaim, in the hill country of Ephraim; the place, it may be, now known as Neby Samwil, a hill sloping gradually to a higher elevation than any other near it, and a striking object in the land-

escape north of Jerusalem, from which it is only five miles distant. Possibly, however, it was some other place not yet identified. Elkanah had two wives; Hannah, his favourite, who had no children, and Peninnah, who had a family. To be childless, and especially to have no son, is a sore trial in the East, so that Hannah had her own troubles, in spite of the love borne her by her husband. In accordance with the command of the Law¹ Elkanah was in the habit of going yearly, with his household, to "worship and to sacrifice to Jehovah of hosts," at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle had been set up; a place deserted even in Samuel's later years, and now known only by the ancient name clinging to it, and by some heaps of very old stone walls, in a district of low hills and fruitful hollows. At this time, the High Priest was a venerable old man, Eli, who was assisted, or should have been so, in his duties, by his two priest-sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who, however, were a scandal rather than an ornament to their office. But the feast had few joys for Hannah, who felt the taunts of her rival at her childlessness very deeply. A son, however, was at last granted her in answer to earnest prayer; Samuel, the child "asked of God." Three years passed, and the infant had been weaned.² He was old enough now to be carried to Shiloh, and there, was formally consecrated to the public service of God by his mother, in accordance with a vow made before his birth. It is not likely, however, that he was left at the tabernacle so early, for he would have been only a burden while so young, and the training by a Hebrew parent was expected to continue till the child was thirteen. But from that time, at latest, he was handed over to Eli, with the customary

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 23; Deut. xvi. 16.

² 2 Macc. vii. 27.

offering, and left to grow up in his charge, Hannah taking care to remind Eli, that the lad had been given her after a promise on her part, that he would be devoted to God; she being the woman he had noticed, years before, praying for a son. The hymn in which she records her gratitude to Jehovah, for making her a mother, reveals a character foreshadowing that of her famous child; the first of three brothers and two sisters, of whom, however, nothing is told us. Left in Shiloh, young Samuel still remained dear to his mother's heart. Year by year, as she came to the annual sacrifice, a mother's love was shown by her bringing for her boy a new linen ephod, the mark of a priest, though he was not of priestly birth, his father being only a Levite, and it is noteworthy that the last notice of him describes his wearing such a "coat," as if the love of his mother had made it dear to him as long as he lived. Meanwhile, the child grew on, justifying all Hannah's fond expectations. But matters went from bad to worse in the family of Eli. His sons were scandalous priests, and brought religion into contempt, by their profligacy. In the end, a "man of God," coming to the High Priest, their father, showed the gravity of the evil, by denouncing him for not having prevented such outrages on sacred things, and for thus appearing to treat lightly what he should have guarded most jealously. His race, he was told, would be terribly punished. It would be degraded from its high position, brought to poverty, smitten, in each generation, with early death, and, moreover, his two sons would die on the same day, by a violent end.

That prophets, though apparently rare, still had a place in the social life of Israel, is shown by this incident, but the consecration of Samuel to the office was approaching

and was destined to confer on the order, a new glory. His quiet days passed in such ministrations before Eli, as were suited to his years. Amidst the darkening times, his example was, perhaps, the one point of light. The "word of Jehovah," that is, the voice of prophets, was rare in those days; there was no widely spread "vision." One night, however, when Eli had lain down to sleep—the lamps of the seven-branched "candlestick," kindled each night, having still some oil, so that it was not yet morning, Samuel heard a voice calling him. The High Priest being all but blind, with age, it seemed as if he had waked, and needed some service. Answering at once, on this supposition, Samuel hastily rose, and running to Eli, made known his presence, modestly saying, "Here am I; for thou calledst me." "I did not call you," said the old man; "lie down again." So he went back to his sleeping-mat. But, now, once more, the lad heard his name called, and, forthwith, hurried again to Eli, repeating the intimation of his being beside him in answer to his summons. But, once more, Eli had to tell him, "I did not call you, my son; lie down again." What could it mean? Samuel did not as yet know about Divine visitations, nor had any communication from God been as yet made to him. He must have been in a difficulty. Now, however, the voice sounded in the silence of the dim chamber, a third time—"Samuel!" There was no room for doubt. Some one had called out his name thrice. A third time he stood beside Eli. "Here am I," said he, "for thou *didst* call me." There was no one in the place but themselves, and it was certain that Samuel had been named aloud. If Eli had not done so, it must have been God who had called him. "Samuel," said the priest, therefore, "go, lie down;

it is no other than Jehovah who has spoken to you. If He call you again, say, Speak, Jehovah; for Thy servant heareth." A little after, "Samuel, Samuel," twice repeated, filled the heart of the lad with awe, but he was able to do as Eli had directed, answering—"Speak; for Thy servant heareth." Then followed a fearful repetition of the curse on Eli and his house, sounded already, as a warning, by the "man of God," but evidently neglected by the High Priest. It was too awful, to tell the unfortunate object of it. Morning came, and Samuel, as usual, opened the doors of the Tabernacle, but he could not venture to deliver the dreadful message. Noticing his silence, and knowing that a communication from God had been made to him, the High Priest at last called him, and demanded to be told all that had been said by the Almighty, imprecating on the lad whatever evil had been threatened, if he hesitated to reveal every word. A full disclosure followed, memorable for the admirable spirit in which Eli received it. "It is Jehovah," said he, meekly, "let Him do what seemeth Him good." News of such a weighty honour, paid by God to so young a lad, must have spread over all the land. Samuel was still in early youth, but it was clear that even while thus so young, God had chosen him as a prophet specially to be heeded. Fresh communications, moreover, were from time to time vouchsafed to him, and all he said was found so exactly true, that there could be no doubt of his being the mouthpiece of the Lord to His people. From Dan to Beersheba, men recognised in him a medium of Divine revelations. Once more, in the son of faithful Hannah, God had visited Israel.

THE FALL OF SHILOH.

HISTORICAL incidents of a period so remote as the twelfth century before Christ must, necessarily, be very partially traceable, in any fulness of detail, in our day. Excavations at Lachish, however, have recently shown that the sea-coast plain was, even much earlier, the seat of successive warlike races, who could not fail to trouble the hill country behind them, now held, more or less firmly, by the Hebrews. In the centuries before Joshua, the highlands of Palestine had been the seat of nations so rich and powerful, as to have excited the lust of conquest in the Egyptian kings, and to have fallen only after a long and brave resistance. But they had succumbed at last, and, thus, had left the hills a comparatively easy prey to the invading Israelites. The loose tribal organisation of these new-comers, however, had kept them weak, and hence, their upland glens, and the passes through their country, by which caravans crossed to the east or north-east, into Western Asia, were an inviting bait to the fierce and energetic races of the lowlands. Of these, a people known, already, in early times, but now grown to a powerful state—the Philistines—had extended their commerce in all directions, opening routes for it by the force of arms where necessary. As, however, the main channels of trade led through the passes of the Hebrew territory, it was a great matter with the lowlanders, to get these into their hands,

which meant the subjugation of the Jewish tribes. From Samuel's time, therefore, and, indeed, from before it, they kept them either in constant fear of inroads, or held them in subjection, till David finally broke their power. Some time in the earlier years of Samuel, a grand raid into the hills had been planned. News came to the tribes that their foe was gathering at Aphek, apparently near Gath. As the way into the hills from this point, was by the Wady Surak, which opens out into the plains in a line with the future capital of Israel—Jerusalem—the Hebrews collected their levies at the head of it, near a spot known as Ebenezer—"the stone of help"—seemingly near Beth-Shemesh—"the house of the sun"—then, or afterwards, a frontier Philistine post. In due time the enemy appeared, but the Hebrews, badly prepared to oppose men fully armed, and trained for war, broke and fled before the invaders. They had not, however, lost heart, and rallied near the scene of their defeat. How could it be that they, the worshippers of Jehovah, had been beaten on His own territory, by the Philistine? Sorely fallen from healthy religiousness, they did not realise that their misfortune was due to their own moral decline, and seek a return of God's favour by sincere repentance and confession, but fancied that it rose from their not having brought with them the sacred ark, from the Tabernacle at Shiloh. If it were on the spot, God could hardly, thought they, let His honour suffer, by giving the triumph to the gods of the Uncircumcised. The sheiks of the Hebrew force, therefore, proposed to their men that it should be sent for, and this being agreed upon, messengers sped, north-east, over and round the hills, to Shiloh, more than thirty miles away, as the crow flies. Eli, at once, weakly let the sacred

relic be carried back; his two worthless sons, forsooth, attending, as its special guardians. A great shout greeted its arrival; so great, that "the earth rang again" with its loudness. The reason for such a commotion was soon known to the enemy, and for a time struck terror into their hearts. The mighty God who had so grievously smitten the Egyptians, long before, could, assuredly, break the power of Philistia! But its people were of stout spirits, and soon regained their presence of mind. "Are we Philistines," they asked, "to be slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been to us? Never! Be strong, therefore, and let us quit ourselves like men, and fight to the death, rather than be beaten."

When the struggle began, the effect of such vigorous resolution was soon apparent. Israel once more fled, routed utterly, this time; the very ark being left in the hands of the enemy, and thousands of the Hebrews lying dead on the hills. The curse of God on Hophni and Phinehas, spoken long years before by the old prophet, had fallen on the two brothers, for they both had perished. Israel was, for the time, utterly crushed. Meanwhile, a Benjamite who had escaped the terrible slaughter, was rushing as only an Eastern runner can, from the wild whirl of the battle, with the few fugitives from its multiplying disasters, and, never resting by the way, came, the same day, to Shiloh—his clothes rent and dust on his head—proclaiming, even without words, the ruin he had left behind him. The road stretches along a rich plain just before it reaches Shiloh, so that any one approaching is seen from quite a distance, and watchers were assuredly on the look out, that day, for tidings from the front. Eli, himself, blind through age, and heavy, had been

brought to the roadside, and sat there, on a bench, listening eagerly for any intelligence from Ebenezer. Suddenly a man was seen nearing the little town, running wildly. He must be from the field! As he advanced, across the open ground to the south, by which one must come from Bethel and the parts west of it,—then the centre of such absorbing interest,—there was no question of his being a runner from the battlefield. Man and woman, alike, rushed down the slopes, to hear the news, which could hardly be good, else he would surely have shown signs of joy. But, now, they see that his clothes are torn, and his bare head covered with earth; signs of the deepest mourning.¹ The day must have been lost! Wild shrieks of despair forthwith rent the air, for Orientals are, at all times, demonstrative, to an extent of which Western nations know nothing. Eli, old and blind, was still sitting by the roadside, eagerly waiting for news, above all of the fate of the ark, which his conscience reproached him for having allowed to be taken to the field, without permission from God. But, now, the jaded runner, and the screaming crowd, had come into the village, and even Eli's deafness was horrified by the loud wailing. "What news?" asked the old priest. The runner, making his way to him, told all, as well as his spent voice and strength could force it from his lips. Eli was ninety-eight years old, blind and heavy, but the ark was dear to him even in his decay. "I have come from the battle," muttered the runner. "I have run the whole way to-day." "What has happened there, my son?" stammered out the High Priest. "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a very

¹ Josh. vii. 6.

great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons, also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken!" Calamity had been heaped on calamity, but each detail of the tragic recital had been borne till the fate of the ark was told. This, however, was too heavy a blow for the feeble vitality of Eli. Falling backward from his seat which had been set at the gate of the village, that he might catch the earliest news, his neck was broken, and an instant death spared him further sorrow. But the misfortunes of the day were not yet ended. The wife of Phinehas that afternoon had a child, and though it was a son, and thus, otherwise, a great joy to an Oriental mother, she sank and died before nightfall, grieving, doubtless, for the death of her husband, but even more agonisingly because the ark was lost! She had only strength enough to sigh out, that the boy's name should be Ichabod, that is, "without glory," for the "glory is departed from Israel!" The ark was taken, her husband was dead, and old Eli was dead; what was there left to the poor stricken lady! Even Shiloh itself, shared in the general ruin, for, in the Psalms, we read¹ "they provoked Him (God) to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand. He gave His people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with His inheritance. The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests

¹ Ps. lxxviii. 60, &c.

fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation." From this, it would appear as if the enemy had advanced to Shiloh, and burnt it to the ground, with a great slaughter of its inhabitants, so that it was thenceforward deserted. In Jeremiah's time it had long been utterly uninhabited, and its site was only rediscovered in the present generation.¹

¹ Jer. vii. 12; xxvi. 6.

SAMUEL, THE REFORMER.

RELIGION must have fallen into a very low state, to make it possible for men like Hophni and Phinehas to officiate as priests till their death. But it was only one indication among many, that the enthusiasm for Jehovah which characterised the days of Joshua, had quite died away, leaving, at best, only isolated successors of the sincere worship of former times. The situation of the tribes among races of kindred blood, who, on every side of them, were zealous followers of the heathenism of Western Asia, was necessarily perilous to a creed which isolated them from all their neighbours. From Babylon, the religious capital of the vast regions west of the Euphrates, the worship of the sun, moon, and great planets, as the supreme forces in nature, had early spread over Syria and Palestine, developing into hideous corruption, in a climate so conducive to sensuality, till immorality, at last, became part of the rites of every shrine. Nor was this unspeakable foulness the only horror identified with the local worship. God is represented, in the Wisdom of Solomon, as hating "the ancient inhabitants of the land, for doing most odious works of sorceries, and unhallowed rites (of initiation), and for merciless murders of children (offered to their idols), and for making feasts on the flesh of human beings offered in sacrifice, and feasting on human blood (in their initiation into the 'mysteries' of their heathenism),

and because parents killed their helpless infants with their own hands, to offer them to their gods.”¹ The glimpse given of the morals of Sodom and Gomorrah, even as early as the days of Lot, shows a state of things terribly corrupting. It is, therefore, no wonder, to find that Israel soon became tainted with the vices which flourished in all the native communities among which they had made a settlement. The Phœnicians, along the Mediterranean, from north to south of the land; the Canaanites of various names, up and down the hill country; the races over the Jordan; the whole region, in fact, held up, continually, to the Hebrew tribes the most seductive allurements, to leave the Puritanism of their ancestors, and take life as they found it on every hand. The sacrifice of his daughter by Jephthah; the ephod made by Gideon, from the booty of which he had spoiled the invading Arabs; the images set up by Micah, to which a descendant of Gershon, the son of Moses, acted as priest;² images which included “an ephod, and teraphim (or household gods), and a graven image and a molten image,”³ and the worthlessness of the priestly sons of Eli, are hints of a dissolution of ancient morals and faith, which must have made his countrymen, in the days of Samuel, almost as heathen as the populations round them. The isolation of the different tribes, each caring chiefly for its own little district, added to the disintegrating influences, by destroying largely, at least for the time, a feeling of common nationality and interests, and, with this, the healthy power of a large and worthy public morality, common to all. For it was easy to decline from the ways of the past, when communities were small, and unsupported by others who still cherished

¹ Wisdom xii, 3-6.² Judg. xviii, 30.³ Judg. xviii, 14.

them; especially when larger and more highly organised nations scouted those ways, as worthy only of a simple and ignorant race.

Into this gross and sensual environment Samuel was born, but he had the priceless blessing, as we see from her "song," of a mother with lofty spiritual instincts, which clung lovingly to the pure ideals of the best period of her national history. We know nothing of his father, but, in any case, the mighty formative influence of a mother, on the character of the child, so long in her exclusive charge, moulded the qualities of the son, and, through him, created, in a larger sense than could be ascribed to Moses himself, the Israel of all ages since. The impressions of early years never leave us, and what those of Samuel were, in respect to religion, we see from the incident of his first revelation from God. In his case, the child was, emphatically, the father of the man. As he grew to manhood, the lapse of his countrymen into virtual heathenism pointed out clearly, the special work to which his life should be devoted. His influence as a recognised prophet, naturally grew with his years, while his marked greatness of moral worth, and the instinctive feeling of the multitude, that he, above all his contemporaries, was fitted to succeed Eli in the high office of Shaphat or Judge, raised him, after the catastrophe of Shiloh, to that supreme dignity. How many of the tribes acknowledged his authority is not told us, but, assuredly, only some of them did so. The rivalries of all tribal governments; that fatal but inevitable result of the parochial conception of things misnamed Home Rule; had divided the septs of Israel hopelessly, ever since the healthy bond of a strong central authority had been lost, on the death of Joshua. The clans of

Scotland and of Ireland prove what such a political constitution brings with it—the rule of a petty chief, the poverty and degradation of the mass of the tribe, and constant feuds with the tribes around. The book of Judges shows that even the most famous rulers, of the time it embraces, had only a very local authority, though for a moment, perhaps, as in the case of Deborah and Gideon, there was a wider rally against a dangerous enemy. But Dan, Asher, and Reuben, who were at a distance from the districts suffering from the Canaanites, are expressly said not to have joined Barak, and the glory of following Gideon is assigned only to Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh.¹ The Arab rule by sheiks was, in fact, all that was known, and no one who has seen what this implies, will think it strange that the Hebrews sank under it, till they were scarcely recognisable as the fierce Puritan race, that had swept like a whirlwind, under Joshua, from one victory to another. To restore the reign of law was a first essential, in such an age, and hence we find Samuel holding courts at Mizpeh, his own home, at Bethel, ten miles north-east of it, and at Gilgal, in the Jordan valley, about eighteen miles to the east of Mizpeh. So limited, however, was the sphere in which even he could exercise authority; so completely independent, and broken off from the central kernel of the nation, were the bulk of the tribes, even under Samuel. He seems, however, gradually to have extended his power, for we find his son, in his father's old age, judging at Beersheba, on the extreme south of the country.

But the prophet, in his little sphere, exercised kingly authority; summoning great gatherings of the people from

¹ Judg. v. 7.

far and wide, to Mizpeh, as occasion required, and acting, there, as their unchallenged head. It was he, also, who chose Saul, as the first king, and anointed David as his successor. His position, as the leader of the nation, was, indeed, unquestioned. But it is characteristic of him, that his bearing was, at all times, that of a servant of God, and that, while others might be contented, like the heathen round, with a merely ritual religion, he anticipated the words of our Lord, that true religion was that, only, which was rendered in spirit and in truth. At Mizpeh, he gathers the tribes that he may pray "for them to Jehovah," and the result of his bearing was a public confession by the nation, of its sin; a great step towards a sincere reformation. When Saul has been chosen as king, he tells the people that their prosperity, under him, depends on their fearing and obeying God.¹ In dismissing them, he repeats his counsel, in memorable words; "I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear Jehovah, and serve Him in truth, with all your heart."² When Saul is rejected, his words are very striking. "Hath Jehovah," he asks, "as great delight in burnt-offerings, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."³

Such teaching, continued through a long life, and supported by a venerable consistency of practice, must have been of immense weight, in restoring a healthier religious feeling in Israel, but Samuel did not leave this great end, to the necessarily limited sphere of his personal example and precepts. His countrymen owed to him the priceless benefit, of an organised system of religious instruction, by his institutions known as "the Schools of the Prophets;"

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 14.

² 1 Sam. xii. 23, 24.

³ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

organisations, apparently, very similar to our theological colleges. We find one in Ramah, during his lifetime,¹ for "Naioth" means the "home" or "school" of the prophets. Others are mentioned, elsewhere; as at Bethel, Jericho, Gilgal, and various places;² their usefulness being so great that they continued to the latest period of the national history. The "scholars" in some were very numerous.³

A head prophet was over each; its "father" or "master;"⁴ the students being called his "sons." What subjects occupied them we do not know, beyond the certainty that they had relations to the various details of religious life and practice. They gave themselves, however, to a large extent, to music, for use in connection with religious exercises, and, no doubt, spent their lives, after they left their communities, in teaching throughout the land, and otherwise discharging the duties of clergy. A faithful body of Jehovah worshippers was thus preserved in even the darkest times, and, hence, there was always "a godly seed," from which new revivals sprang, after the deepest national declensions. Samuel lives, to-day, in his great work, for, without him, it is difficult to think how the faith, once cherished by the Hebrews, could have been kept from dying out. He rekindled the sacred torch, and passed it on to all the generations since.

¹ 1 Sam. xix. 19, 20.

² 2 Kings ii. 3; iv. 38; vi. 1.

³ 1 Kings xviii. 4; xxii. 6; 2 Kings ii. 16.

⁴ 1 Sam. x. 12; xix. 20; 2 Kings ii. 3.

INTRODUCTION OF MONARCHY.

WHEN I was in Southern Palestine, the men with my tent and luggage, one day failed to come to the appointed halting-place, having lost their way, and I was thus forced to seek shelter for the night, in the "castle" of the sheik of Beit Jebrin; an old villain, famous in past years for waylaying and robbing every one who crossed his district, but, now, in terror of the Turkish governor of Hebron, who had sent soldiers against him, and given him a liberal experience of the harrying and plunder he had himself inflicted on so many. It was a tall square "peel," like those of Northumberland, and hardly in better condition. High stone walls enclosed a courtyard, from which, as I afterwards found, stairs of the most perilous frailness and the most aboriginal roughness of carpentry, led to an upper storey. Here, an equally frail creation of the adze and auger, led to the apartments of the women, which occupied a stone wing of the "peel." The entrance to this formidable, though rather tumble-down stronghold, was by an archway from the road, with heavy gates; no light; and abundant proofs, underfoot, of its use by more than one kind of quadruped. Making my way beyond a high wall which rose, on the left hand, to the spring of rude arches far overhead, I found that it turned to the left, at a right angle, forming one side of a rough rectangular space, regarded, apparently, as the

hall of audience, for which its ample size well fitted it. What daylight struggled into this, must have forced its way down the long murky arched entrance, and, then, back into the wide "audience chamber," or climbed into it through the round arched spaces, above the side wall, supporting the floor overhead, which were quite open. I did not see any windows, though there may have been one or two narrow unglazed openings in the end wall, but if so, they were high up. A dim, small lamp burned in a niche, low down, in this, but there was also a glimmer from a fire of thistle stalks and the like, in a long horseshoe depression at one side of the chamber; the floor of which, roughly paved with stone, was so raised everywhere else, that the horseshoe formed, all round, except at the open lower end, a bench, along which the guests and dignitaries of the district might hang their legs, at least in sight of the minute conflagration intended to heat the wild apartment. That night, as it happened, there was a great gathering of the "elders" of Beit Jibrin. One of the worshipful community was "wanted" by the governor of Hebron, for robbery, and two horse soldiers—fine big Kurds, from far distant Armenia—were present from headquarters, to arrest the scoundrel. The sheik sat on a piece of carpet over which a cushion had been laid, to make his old limbs a trifle comfortable; his place being at the head of the long horseshoe, a little back, at the wall. The "elders" and the two cavalry men sat with their legs towards the fire, which one of the dignitaries, from time to time, poked into a momentary gleam. On my entering, the sheik, poor old man, rose, and continued standing till I was seated beside him; that is, in the place of honour. Of course, I had nothing to do but

listen. Tongues went glibly, and all were hugely interested, for an Oriental group; the discussion, as I afterwards found, being on no less momentous a point than the price to be paid the two soldiers, for returning to Hebron with the report that the criminal, who all this time was present, could not be found! They finally got their money, and set out for the city of Abraham next morning, without a prisoner, but with me in their company, glad to avail myself of the protection, in a lawless region, which the sight of them afforded.

I have told this incident because it, in some measure, helps to bring back to us, the state of things in the old days of Samuel. "Elders," headed by a sheik, then, as now, formed the only government of the country communities, and there were few or no towns; even the future king finding his occupation in the humble duties of a rude, half pastoral, half agricultural life; looking after strayed asses one day, and driving, or, rather, leading, the cattle, that is, a flock of sheep and goats, from the open commons, called in the Old Testament "the field," on another. It was "the elders of Israel," we are told, who came to Samuel as the spokesmen of the people, and what these elders might be we see from my experience. Their rule means, simply, the rudest form of municipal organisation; dealing with the petty details of an encampment, a village, or a hamlet, and yet subordinate to the despotism of the sheik; the system, in fact, found among tribes so elementary in their ideas as the North American Indians. It can afford no protection against more centralised authority, uniting weak tribes into a powerful people, and is, indeed, only suited for the primitive state of society in which it still prevails. An

example of this occurred while I was at Gaza. A man of an Arab tribe encamped near Beersheba, had been murdered by a fellow-tribesman, who had fled to the tents of a neighbouring, but independent tribe. The sheik of the murdered man's tribe was, forthwith, summoned before the local governor at Gaza, and ordered to go after the fugitive and arrest him. I heard the whole proceedings. The sheik was a fine-looking old man, with all the instinctive dignity natural to the Oriental of every degree. Listening quietly till the governor ended, he very composedly asked if the caimacan was prepared to send five hundred troops, to help him to carry out the order. But the governor had no troops to send, and told him so. "Then," said the sheik, "I will do nothing," and walked away, no one stopping him; to set out, forthwith, for the encampment of his tribe. I afterwards had coffee in the tent of the sheik of the tribe in which the murderer had found refuge, which had moved to a position from which it could readily place its flocks in security, in case any attempt were made against it, to get at the criminal. With such a triumph of Home Rule prevailing, Israel was as helpless against any better organised people as the old Irish tribes or the Scotch clans were against "the Saxons." Nor was internal progress more attainable, for what could such independent parish communities do, in developing a higher civilisation? The resources of a united people, the market thus offered for not only necessities but luxuries, the power of mutual protection secured, the prevalence of a common law, the extinction of miserable local feuds and jealousies, and the inspiration of a sense of wide national ideals, are essential to the rise of any tribal or poor communities from their

isolation, with its manifold weakness, and equally helpless poverty. What could the barren highlands of Scotland do for their population, if cut off, in any measure, from the rich openings of the lowlands, and of the neighbouring England? What could the wretched territory of Judah and Simeon do, alone, compared with what might be done, were they linked in a friendly unity with the rich Ephraim, and the green North? Of course, even the wisest measures might be neutralised, as the erection of a common monarchy in Israel was, by the folly of despotism, and the jealousy of the two leading tribes, but the fact remains that, even with this cutting off, the little country into two again, both parts attained a power and dignity never enjoyed when the merely tribal government prevailed, and retained their national life for three and four hundred years respectively, after the great Secession. Feeling all this, and seeing that the sons of Samuel, far from being like their father, stooped to take bribes as judges, and "turned aside after lucre, and perverted judgment," the heads of the tribes naturally sought to change a form of constitution, which had worked so badly, and to have the form introduced, which had made the little nations round comparatively strong; to have a king, in short, "to judge them as kings judged all the nations." But Samuel had grown up under the old system of judges, chosen as circumstances prompted, and regarded the proposal to have a king, as an invasion of the rights of Jehovah; the Great Suzerain of His people. Yet, had he been free to see things in a clear unprejudiced light, he would have remembered that Israel had been virtually under a king, as long as Moses and Joshua lived, and that it had won all its glory during that period. He

saw better than others the darker side of the new popular wish, but had no eyes for its merits. "This," said he to the people, "will be the kind of king you will have. He will press your sons, and use them as his charioteers, his horsemen, and the runners before his chariot. And he will brigade others, as he thinks fit, into thousands, and fifties, and put them under officers, and make them plough his kingly domains, and reap his harvests, and forge the weapons for his forces, and the equipment of his chariots, and he will press your daughters, for perfume makers in his court, and for cooks and bakers. And he will seize your fields, your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his retainers. And he will make you give him, besides, a tenth of the grain from the fields he has left you, and a tenth from your remaining vineyards, and assign them to his officials and servants. And he will press to his service of other kinds, your man-slaves and your women-slaves, and your best oxen, and your asses. He will, moreover, levy from you every tenth sheep you have, and as to yourselves, you will be no better than his slaves. You are crying out now for a king, but when you have got one, you will cry out for the old times, when you had not as yet chosen monarchy. But Jehovah will not hear you." All this was too faithfully realised, but the evils of the past, and of the moment, outweighed any unknown dangers of the future. Samuel could make no impression on the multitude. They were set on being like neighbouring races. Their pride of nationality had been waked by Samuel himself, and a nation without a king seemed less a nation, than when able to boast of one. So the prophet at last gave way, and Saul became, by popular choice, the first king of Israel.

THE ELECTION OF SAUL.

SINCE the people were determined to have a king, it fell to Samuel, as the head of the nation for the time, to nominate some fit person for their approval; the kings of Israel being elected in an assembly of the tribes, as those of England, nominally were, to the time of William the Conqueror, who required his accession to be ratified by popular acclaim at Westminster. It was a grave responsibility, and even Samuel, with all his knowledge of men, and all the advantages of his lofty position, made, as it proved, according to his own later judgment, a questionable choice. In the part of the tribe of Benjamin attached to Ephraim, if the two words translated "A Benjamite," in 1 Samuel ix. 1, do not rather mean, as some fancy, "a man of Jemini," lived a man well-to-do, according to the ideas of the age; that is, rich in land, and the living wealth of a landholder. Kish—for that was his name—must indeed, have been one of the chief men of the day, for his genealogy is given, back to his great-great-grandfather; a mark of the importance of the family for successive generations. In the patriarchal home of this primitive magnate, a son had grown up, of such splendid physical beauty, as to have become more famous for it, far and near, than he, in his modesty, dreamed. Indeed, it might well be so, for he was taller than any man in the land, from his shoulders, upward, and magnificent, otherwise, in proportion;

assuredly, in the words of the Scriptures, "a choice young man, and a goodly."

It so happened that in the months during which Samuel was meditating over his great commission, to select a personage suited for the desired king, the she-asses of Kish, left, no doubt, as is still the custom, to graze in the open country, strayed, no one knew whither, and Saul was sent, with a man, to find them. Ranging without success through the hill-country of Ephraim, as far, apparently, as Shechem, he turned south again to the Benjamite district, with no better result. The kind heart of Saul was, now, anxious lest his father should think him lost as well as the beasts—a fear which speaks of a very unsettled state of things in the country at large—and proposed to return home. But the ready wit of the man promptly suggested a last effort, which involved little delay and promised well. They were close to the village in which Samuel lived. He was a man of God, said the attendant, and honourable; all his words came surely to pass; perhaps he could tell them where the asses were. The whole incident is delightfully primitive. The great prophet consulted about finding stray asses; the future king distracted by not finding them; the difficulty in the way, from the bread they had brought from home with them having run out, so that they had nothing to give the seer, as the present, without which no Oriental approaches a dignified personage; the escape from their perplexity by the man finding a quarter of a shekel in his girdle—a piece of silver worth sixpence: the king-to-be having no money at all; the climb up the long slope to Ramah; the questioning some young women, coming down to the spring near the hill top to draw water, whether

the seer was at home, and their answer that he had just come to the village, to preside at a feast on the flesh of a sacrifice, to be offered that day in the village chapel, or "high-place;" alike breathe an air of the most charming antique simplicity. Samuel, by the way, saw no harm in high-places, which were scattered then, as their counterparts, the small, domed, white-washed shrines, still are, over all the land, so that no landscape is without one. They would catch him, the girls said, looking fondly, we may be sure at the grand young man who addressed them, if they went into the village at once, before he passed up to the high-place to eat, for the people would not begin the feast till he had blessed the sacrifice. After that, the guests invited would eat. Starting off at once, Saul met Samuel at the village gate, on his way up to the high-place. A premonition had already possessed the prophet, sent from above, that a Benjamite he would see that day, was the destined king, and the look of Saul assured him that he was the choice thus marked out. The two were unknown to each other, but in answer to an inquiry by Saul for the seer, he found he was speaking to him. To his astonishment, Samuel presently told him to go before him to the high-place, and that he was to eat with him that day, and stay with him overnight. As to the asses; they were found. He would be free to return home next day, but, before doing so, the great man had matters of importance to speak over, with him. "Though Saul did not know it," he added, "all that was desirable for Israel was in him and in his father's house." But the modesty of Saul could not understand such language from such a source. "Why do you speak in such a way to me?" said he; "am I

not a Benjamite, and, thus, of the smallest of our tribes? and is not my branch of the tribe the smallest of all its branches?" The only reply was, to lead Saul and his man into the rude chamber in which the equally primitive feast was to be held—for they had now reached it—and set the two—the king-to-be and his man, in the two places of highest honour, though thirty of the chief men of the little town were the already invited guests. Moreover, by Samuel's express order, the choice pieces—the rump and the fat tail, reserved for the most honoured guest, were set before Saul. The feast over, the prophet took the wondering Benjamite home with him, and leading him up to the flat roof, as most secluded, and the coolest spot in the hot weather of the season, caused a sleeping mat to be spread there for him, and on this, Saul, no doubt wearied enough, rested till day. The morning was just breaking, when the voice of Samuel, calling from below, woke the sleeper, who was now to be allowed to go home. In a few minutes both were on the way down to the village gate, but, now, the man was requested to go on, while the two lingered for a time behind. Quite by themselves, Samuel produced "a vial" of oil, and pouring it on Saul's head, kissed him, with the startling greeting that he was "the anointed of God," over Israel. In that age, everything was expected to be confirmed by some "sign," and one was accordingly granted to Saul; as it were, supporting the authority of Samuel for what he had done. He was told that at the oak of Tabor, a spot now unknown, he would meet three men going up to Bethel, which apparently had, from remote times, been a famous "high-place," to offer, before God, three kids, three loaves of bread,

and a skin of wine. These would salute him with the customary inquiry after his welfare or "peace," and give him two of the three loaves. Then he would come to "Gibeah of God," where the Philistines had a post, and as he approached the town, he would meet a company of prophets coming down from the "high-place," or local shrine; some of them before the others, playing, one on a psaltery or twelve-stringed triangular harp, a second with a tambourine, a third with a reed pipe, and a fourth with a cither, or guitar, while the others, behind them, were "prophesying;" which, in this case, with music sounding in advance, must have meant highly wrought outbursts of religious feeling, whether in chants or ecstatic utterances. Carried away by the excitement within and before him, Saul would be affected as these were, and "prophesy" with them. He was afterwards to go down to the holy place of Gilgal, on the Jericho slope, and wait seven days for Samuel, who would come to offer burnt and peace offerings, and tell him what he was to do. All this, we are told, happened as predicted. An uncle of Saul, it appears, lived at Gibeah, which seems also to have been the home of Kish, but the anointed of Samuel carefully avoided alluding, in his intercourse with him, to what had passed between himself and the prophet. The time appointed for the journey to Gilgal does not, however, seem to have been fixed, so that Saul next comes before us at his father's house, busy driving the plough in the fields, as if nothing special had happened.

The development of the monarchical agitation transfers the scene, in its further stage, once more to Mizpeh; very possibly, the long high slope now known as Nebi

Samwil. Thither the people were again summoned by Samuel. Still regarding the wish for a king as a rejection of God, but bowing to a public demand which he could not resist, the prophet had ordered them to present themselves "before the Lord," by tribes, each marshalled in the subdivisions known as "thousands." Out of the whole, not Ephraim, the supreme tribe, but Benjamin, the smallest, was taken, no doubt to the astonishment of the assembly. Then, from Benjamin, the lot fell on the sub-clan of Matri. This was next made to pass before Samuel, man by man, and, lo ! the choice ultimately fell on Saul, who, however, was nowhere to be found. "To inquire of Jehovah," whatever that means, was the custom in even the smallest difficulties, in those days, and it was resorted to now, with the result, we are told, that Jehovah answered, "Behold he has hidden himself among the stuff;" that is, among the wallets of food and skins of wine or sour milk, which the multitude had brought with them. Off, at once, ran eager feet, to the piles of commissariat, and finding him there, brought him, forthwith, to Samuel, who set him before the excited throng, every eye in which turned to the one spot, to see their future king. There he stood, above every one round ; a king every inch ! "Behold the man whom Jehovah has chosen," cried Samuel ; "a man like whom there is not another among all the people." Even the prophet was for the time enthusiastic, in spite of his stern conservatism. As to the multitude, they were beside themselves for joy, and rent the air with loud and long shouts of "God save the king !" But all was not yet over. Samuel had counsel to offer, as to the constitution of the new monarchy. His exposition, indeed, was given forth

as of permanently binding force, on king and people alike, and only when this had been finished, and duly engrossed in "the Book" of the kingdom, which was, henceforth, to be laid up "before Jehovah," did he dismiss the assembly. Some "children of Belial" alone murmured; men of no weight in the land. Round Saul, meanwhile, a band of the most valiant men of the tribes ranged themselves, as a guard of honour. Escorted by these, he returned "home, to Gibeah," the land of Kish being evidently beside that town, and resumed the modest labours of the paternal homestead. When next we hear of him, he is "coming after the herd," from the open country, where they had been feeding. So simple were manners in these remote days! They remind one of the equally simple ways described in Homer.

SAMUEL'S PARTING ADDRESS.

THE election of a king, involving as it did, a complete constitutional revolution in the hitherto prevailing tribal government of Israel, was so grave a change, that Samuel appears to have taken the opportunity of Saul's return to Gilgal from his victorious raid against Nahash, "the Serpent," King of Ammon, to repeat the solemn service of his confirmation on the throne, which had already been formally carried out at Mizpeh.¹ To Gilgal, therefore, the people were summoned, and there they once more acclaimed Saul their king, ratifying their act by solemn offerings on the local altar, amidst great rejoicings; Samuel, apparently, acting as priest, for there is no mention of any other prominent person. But his office, as ruler of the nation, was now over. Henceforth, he was, nominally at least, to take a subordinate position, though, in reality, leaving Saul only the name of king, and himself exercising all his past supremacy. He could not, however, resign even the outward symbols of power without asking a solemn judgment on his life, as hitherto their head. There was nothing in his career of which he was ashamed, and he wished to have a clear verdict to that effect from the people. Gathering the multitude, therefore, before him, he addressed them in words which are touching even now, after all the centuries that have passed since.

¹ 1 Sam. xi. 14.

"Behold," said he, "I have listened to your demand, in all its fulness, and have made a king over you. And, now, this king is before you," pointing, we may suppose, to the grand figure of Saul, by his side, "but I am old and grey headed, as the age of my sons, whom you know, testifies. As to my life, it has been spent in your sight, from my childhood till now. Behold, here I stand. If any one has aught to lay to my charge, in all my past career, let him come forward, and witness against me before Jehovah, and before His anointed king, Saul. Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I taken? Have I ever used my office as judge to confiscate the least fraction of any one's property? Whom have I defrauded, for my own advantage, by unrighteous decisions? Whom have I oppressed by using the power of my office wrongfully, to his injury? From whose hands have I accepted any ransom in money, to free him, unjustly, from deserved death, or any bribe, even to the worth of a pair of shoes, that the gift should blind my eyes to impartial justice? Witness against me, any of you, if you can charge me with such deeds, and I will restore to you all I have wrongfully taken." Forthwith rose a shout from the whole assembly, that the noble old man had neither defrauded them, nor oppressed them, nor ever taken bribes from any one. "Jehovah, then, be witness against you," replied he, "and let His anointed be witness, this day, that ye have found no cause of blame against me." "So let it be," answered the multitude. "Jehovah, who raised Moses and Aaron to be heads of your fathers, and who brought up your ancestors from Egypt, be witness between us," replied Samuel; "and now that you have vindicated my uprightness," he went on, "stand still where you are,

while I recall to you, for your good, hereafter, all the gracious acts of Jehovah to you, and to your fathers, in the past. When our people were in sore trouble in Egypt Jehovah sent Moses and Aaron, who brought them out of it, and gave them this land as their own. Then, when they forgot their God, so that He sold them into the hand of Sisera, and of the Philistines, and of the King of Moab, and their misery had made them cry to Him for deliverance, how merciful was He! As soon as they said 'We have sinned, for we have forsaken Jehovah, and have served the Baals and the Ashtoreths of the heathen, but, now, if God deliver us from our enemies, we will serve Him,' He sent Gideon and Barak, and, lastly, myself, and overthrew their enemies, and made their land safe to them. Yet, now, when Nahash, the Ammonite, attacked you; instead of trusting the God who had delivered you in times past, you said, 'Nay; we shall not any more look to judges raised up for the occasion, but shall have a king,' when Jehovah was already your king. Now therefore, see the graciousness of God. He has given you the king you so desired, although you have slighted Him in having such a wish! But, now that he is appointed, let me tell you how you may prosper under him. If you fear Jehovah and serve Him, and obey His voice, and both you and your king keep on following the Lord your God, all will be well. But if you disobey the voice of Jehovah, and rebel against His commands, His hand will be against you as it was against your fathers, and also against your king." As, however, in those ages, nothing was thought to be conclusive, in any religious solemnity, without some extraordinary recognition of the Divine assent to it, by a supernatural sign, Samuel was now prepared to give them

one. "To prove that I have spoken the mind of God," cried the prophet, "stand still, where you are, and you will see a great wonder, which Jehovah will do before you. Is it not at this time wheat harvest, when the rains are long over, and only bright skies are known? Well, although this be so, I will call on Jehovah, and He will send thunder and rain. It will show you that you have done very wickedly in asking a king, and it will also show you, that He sanctions all I have said in His name." It was the month of May or of June. A rain storm is most uncommon at this season, but now, on Samuel "calling unto Jehovah," a wild tempest of thunder and rain broke over the landscape. To the Israelite, thunder was the voice of the Almighty, as we often see in the Psalms. Its rolling terrors filled every heart with alarm, for did it not show that God was ever at hand to punish His enemies? A loud cry, therefore, rose from the crowd, that Samuel should intercede for them, lest some punishment should fall on them, for the sin of having asked a king. "Fear not," replied Samuel, "you have, indeed, done this wicked act, yet only turn ye not aside from following Jehovah, but serve Him with all your heart: turn not aside after idols, which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing! For if ye be thus true to Him, Jehovah will not forsake you, for His great name's sake, for it has pleased Him to make you His people. As for me, God forbid that I should not pray for you as you ask, but I will, besides, serve the Lord myself, and thus teach you the good and the right way. Only fear Jehovah, and serve Him in truth, with all your heart, remembering what great things He has done for you. If, however, ye shall act wickedly, ye shall be swept away, ye and your king," Henceforth, Saul

was nominally monarch, but so little did he actually reign, that the very next chapter informs us, of Samuel's announcing to him that "his kingdom would not continue," because, when Samuel had told him to wait for him in Gilgal, for seven days, he had, at last, acted independently, though in the most trying circumstances. He had found, in fact, that "after tarrying the seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed, Samuel had not come." His offence consisted in, himself, offering a sacrifice, to propitiate Jehovah, and win His help against the Philistines, who had penetrated into the heart of the land in great force, terrifying the people so that they fled to the hill-caves, pits, thickets, rocks, and heights, and, indeed, anywhere, to save themselves. The band round Saul, moreover,—the one means of resisting the awful invader,—had melted away from his side, through the agonising delay imposed on them by the prophet. David and Solomon offered sacrifices, so that Saul's acting as priest could not have been his offence, while, as to David, he never allowed any prophet to interfere with his political affairs, though open to their counsels as spiritual advisers.

REJECTION OF SAUL.

"THE word of the Lord," or, rather, "of Jehovah," we are told, came "unto Samuel," but it is not said how it came. At times, it may be, there was an audible voice; but the favoured one usually received the Divine communication in his sleep, by some form of vision and impression on the mind. A "deep sleep" fell on Abram before the great revelation made to him of the future of his race.¹ Samuel had his first disclosures from God after he had lain down to sleep,² and Eliphaz the Temanite tells us that "a word (or oracle) stole on him, and his ear caught its soft sound when dreams wake visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men. Fear came on me and trembling which made all my bones shake. Then a spirit passed before me, making all the hair of my flesh stand up." Presently it stood still, but he could not distinguish its features,—it was only a form. "Then I heard a still small voice, Shall mortal man be just before his Maker?"³ In some such way, we may imagine, the "word" came to Samuel; for it speaks immediately after, of his crying out, in prayer, to Jehovah, all night.

That God should be spoken of as "repenting" His appointment of Saul as king, can only be an instance of applying to the Divine Being the characteristics of men, to help our minds to realise matters more clearly. "God

¹ Gen. xv. 12.

² 1 Sam. iii. 3.

³ Job iv. 12-17.

is not a man, that He should lie ; neither the son of man, that He should repent ; ” ¹ so that where it is said that He repents, the language is only figurative, and intended to represent that the result of His course towards Saul was such as would, in the case of man, have followed regret for past action, and consequent change.

The prophet was deeply moved by the announcement of Saul’s failure as a king. Our version says he was “grieved,” but the Hebrew word means, rather, that he glowed with anger, doubtless at what he held to be Saul’s violation of his kingly faith, which was equivalent, in his eyes, to treason against Jehovah, for whom the offender, at best, was only the earthly deputy. He had “turned back from following God, and had not performed His commandments.” Of these, Samuel himself had been the mouthpiece ; so that, in fact, the prophet was above the king, who had to obey his instructions, without question, in every particular. That he had not done so made Samuel “wroth,”—as the Revised Version properly translates the word. In such a mood, his crying to Jehovah all night could hardly have been for mercy on the transgressor. Was it an entreaty that the kingly office, which Samuel had so earnestly repudiated as out of place in Israel, and which had now proved, in Saul’s hands, a danger to the old system of direct government by God through His prophets, should be abolished ?

Orientals are astir with the dawn, to avoid the heat of the day. The king was still in the South Country, or Negeb,—the “dry” or “parched” district,—and had raised at Carmel a trophy, called “a hand” in the margin of the Revised Version, and a “monument” in its text ;

¹ Num. xxiii. 19.

the word "hand" being thought by some great scholars, from what has been found on Phœnician monuments, to be the emblem of prayer or thanksgiving. The erection, doubtless very rude indeed,—in all probability, only a cairn, of the stones everywhere so plentiful in Palestine,—was to Saul and his people what a triumphal arch is to us, and was intended to celebrate his victory over the Amalekites. Carmel was a hill village some miles south-east of Hebron; and in those days,—if it deserved its name, "the garden,"—must have been much less "dry" or "parched" than it is to-day. The Amalekites were a wild Arab race, at one time very powerful in the land; for we find them holding territory in the centre of the country, and over the whole south, to the Peninsula of Sinai, as far as the borders of Egypt. They had attacked Israel in the wild ravines of Sinai, and had hung on their rear, cutting off stragglers, during all the wilderness journeyings; thus kindling a hatred towards their race which burned in the heart of the Jew from generation to generation. Still hostile in Saul's time, he had been ordered by Samuel to destroy them utterly, and he was now returning from his foray against them. He had surprised their huge encampment, and had massacred the whole tribe, as far as he could, with the exception of the emir, Agag, who was taken prisoner, and reserved, that he might be put to death with special ignominy; for no thought of mercy entered the heart of an Israelite towards the leader of a race so detested. He had thus glutted his fury, to his utmost opportunity, on the tribe itself, which would, apparently, have been annihilated, had not a remnant escaped, with some women and children, through rapid flight; living to become, in their descendants, the objects of

further war, for we find David attacking them,¹ and the Simeonites, who lived in the Negeb, invading Mount Seir, the territory of Edom, against them, so late as the reign of Hezekiah.² Indeed, in Esther, we are told that Haman was an Agagite ; that is, a descendant of the line of emirs of Amalek, the last of their race of whom we read.

But while Saul had ruthlessly destroyed the tribe itself, the temptation to save part of its immense flocks and herds, had been too great for him and his people. Harried as they had been by the Philistines, and sorely in need of live stock, as a farming population, they had hesitated to carry out Samuel's command to "devote," or utterly destroy, all this wealth, and had driven off the best of both sheep and oxen. It was in vain that Saul affected, in answer to the prophet's question as to his thus acting, that he had intended the booty to be used in sacrifice to Jehovah. He had been ordered to destroy it utterly, and he had not done so. To obey the prophet without question, as a subordinate obeys his superior, was demanded of him. He had no right to think for himself or to show any independence whatever. To Samuel the fault of Saul was grave, in his not preventing the people from keeping alive part of the booty, though he may well have felt afraid to oppose his personal will, to that of the rough militia called out for the occasion. He ought to have tried what he could to obey the command given him, and he had not done so. Samuel's answer was very striking. In effect, it was this: "You say that the people have kept alive part of the spoil to sacrifice to God at Gilgal"—the sacred stone circle in the neighbourhood of Jericho, then the headquarters of Jewish worship.—"Has Jehovah as great

¹ 1 Sam. xxx. 17.

² 1 Chron. iv. 42.

delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken (to the Divine voice) than the fat of rams (offered on the altar). For (such) rebellion (as thine, in not passively carrying out my commands, as the mouth-piece of God) is as (bad as) the sin of divination, (that is, seeking revelations through incantations to the dead, or from the flight of arrows, or the motions of entrails, and other heathen ways) and stubbornness, (the following of one's own will, rather than that of God's, in any particular) is as the worship of (public) idols, or of teraphim, (or household idols)." Then came the punishment: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

The principle laid down by Samuel is the very soul and spirit of all religion worthy of the name, and marks the high moral office of the true prophet, as contrasted with the merely ceremonial duties of the priest. Religion is what we are, rather than what we affect by outward acts. The heart right, our acts also will be right; but even actions in themselves right, lose their moral or spiritual worth, when they are not the expression of loving and devout loyalty to God.

ANOINTING OF DAVID.

BETHLEHEM, which is still a thriving little town, must have been much the same in the days of Samuel as it is in our own; for the space available for houses is strictly marked out by the form of the hill on which they stand. A narrow white street winds along the slightly undulating top of a hill 2,555 feet above the Mediterranean, which is about thirty-five miles off. Rich valleys stretch out below, on all sides, divided, on the north, by a saddle of slowly rising ground, along which you approach from Jerusalem. Cream-coloured limestone, easily cut, is the one rock of Palestine. It forms the strongly built and pleasant-looking flat-roofed houses, of one or two storeys, and furnishes, in the soil it yields when it crumbles, an inexhaustible wealth, from which, age after age, nature brings forth, round the year, varied crops of grapes, olives, almonds, barley, wheat, vegetables, lentils, beans, and much else. A shorter street, parallel with the main one, and connected with it, here and there, by short lanes, well-nigh comprises the town, round which one can walk in less than half-an-hour; including much unused ground in the circuit.

In this pleasant place,—with its girdle of round-topped hills beyond the rich valleys at its feet, and its outlook, to the east, on a sea of soft heights, sinking down rapidly towards the Dead Sea, which is visible nearly four thousand

feet below Bethlehem, about fifteen miles off, with the flat line of the hills of Moab shutting in the horizon beyond,—there lived, about three thousand years ago, a well-to-do householder, who possessed land, in the town or near it, and had, besides, flocks pasturing on the slopes which stretch in every direction around, on the other side of the valleys.

To this person Samuel was sent some time after the doom of his line, by deposition from the throne, had been pronounced on Saul. The prophet was told to fill the cow-horn, kept for the purpose, with oil,—supplied, no doubt, from the olives so plentiful in all parts of the land,—and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, as God had provided for Himself a king from among his sons. The mission, however, was dangerous; for Saul would assuredly kill Samuel if the object of his journey were discovered. But a secondary purpose, which would veil the real one, was readily found. The prophet was to take a heifer with him, and announce, on his arrival, that he had come to sacrifice to Jehovah, summoning Jesse and his family to the solemnity, so as to bring its various members before him.

Both larger and smaller communities in Israel were under the rule of a body of “elders,” who acted in all things as the representatives of the population at large. Samuel was a judge as well as a prophet, and in either capacity might have come with some stern intention. The news that he was approaching filled the population, indeed, with such fear, that they hastened to him in a body, to ask if he came peaceably, for it was a great event to have so famous a personage among them. It was, perhaps, the day on which Jesse offered a yearly sacrifice for all his family,¹

¹ 1 Sam. xx. 6.

with the usual feast, after it, on the parts of the victim, which were not burnt. To this, Samuel said, he had come. Let Jesse and his sons "sanctify" themselves; that is, wash their whole persons, and put on clean clothes, that he might rejoice with them¹ in the festivity, to which no others, apparently, were invited.

In due course, Jesse appeared with seven sons, each of whom, in succession, was made to pass before Samuel. Eliab, the eldest, noble in his features and king-like in his height, seemed to the prophet as if he must needs be the future king; but a warning passed on the moment through his mind, full of instruction for all time, that "Jehovah looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart," and the fine youth was suffered to go by without remark. Another son, Abinadab, and five sons besides, followed, one by one; but the chosen of God was not among them all. "Had Jesse no other children?" "Only the youngest, who was now tending the sheep on some hillside near Bethlehem." "Send and fetch him," said Samuel; "for we will not sit down [to the feast] till he come hither."

East of Bethlehem, beyond the town-valley, rise long and comparatively bare slopes, immemorially devoted to pasture. Very probably the missing lad was there with his woolly charge, for he was soon got and brought before the prophet. He had grown to opening manhood; and though, at most, of ordinary height, his winning features, lighted up, we may believe, by magnificent eyes,² and his well-knit and well-proportioned figure, made him "goodly to look upon." There was no mistaking his intellectual

¹ Septuagint.

² "A beautiful countenance"—"fair of eyes" (1 Sam. xvi. 12).

gifts, nor could there be hesitation as to his loving nature ; for to see him was to feel the reality of both. Stories were, doubtless, abroad, even thus early, about him ; for he was devoted to music, and a famous player on the harp, while his songs had, in all likelihood, already won him local fame, for he was a born poet of the rarest merit. His agility and strength were confessed to be amazing ; for in after life he could boast that, in his best days, he could match the gazelle for swiftness, and break a steel bow with his hands.¹ Nor was he less famous for his daring courage ; for it was known over the district, that he had bearded and killed, at different times, single-handed, and armed only with his shepherd's club, a lion, that had come up the ravines from the thickets of the Jordan, far below, and attacked his flock, and a bear that had come out against it from the rough, low-grown tangles of the neighbouring hills, and had killed both.² It is a question, indeed, whether he had not, even at this time, shown his prowess against the outlying pickets of the Philistine invaders of the uplands.

How much of all this was known to Samuel must remain unknown ; but it is natural to suppose that in the interval between the mention of the young hero's name and his being brought, the fond gossip of the family circle may have entertained the prophet with the details of his greatness and amiability, in their partial eyes. In any case, to see him was to feel, with the conviction that to do so was agreeable to the mind of God, that this stripling had in him the making of the king needed for Israel. The horn of oil was forthwith produced, and the lad, to his amazement, was anointed by the prophet as the future

¹ Ps. xviii. 33, 34.

² 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35.

successor of Saul. How far this ultimate intention was communicated to David—for it was he who was thus chosen—is doubtful; but after years threw the needed light on the full significance of the rite,—if, indeed, some measure of homage was not at the moment paid him. It is unlikely, at least, that he remained ignorant of the high fortune awaiting him; but it was as yet, at best, a secret in his own breast, for the realisation of which he had “to tarry the Lord’s leisure.”

The simplicity of the age is shown in the humility with which such an honour from the great prophet was borne. Samuel returned to Ramah, and David quietly went back to the care of his father’s sheep. But the mysterious transaction had stirred and transformed his whole spiritual nature. Though still a shepherd youth, high thoughts rose within him, to which he had hitherto been a stranger. To use the Scripture words, “The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.” God had acted through His prophet, and His impulses were henceforth fitting the chosen one for the destiny before him.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

THE Philistines were a race inhabiting the fertile coast plain of Palestine, as far north as Joppa, having crept upwards from the Delta of the Nile, where they had been settled in very early times. They were, in fact, originally Phœnicians of Kaft-ur,—the greater Kaft; that is, Phœnicia. They had been employed by the Egyptian kings to garrison the five towns in the extreme south of Palestine, but in the end, achieved their independence. Keenly devoted to gain, they were, nevertheless, full of military spirit, and were a terror alike to the Israelites in the hills, and to the peaceful Canaanites of the more northern coast, though these were of the same race as themselves. Like the Phœnicians, they treated the native tribes with great harshness, forcing them to till the ground as their slaves, while they differed from their mother-country in a fierce aggressiveness, which sought to get possession, by force, of the main lines of road in all directions inland, that they might control the caravans using them.

These roads stretched upwards from the plains, through the passes and valleys of the Jewish hills, towards Damascus and the north, and also towards the Jordan and the rich eastern districts. Hence, from a very early period, the well-appointed troops of the Philistine communities marched, from time to time, up this or that entrance to the hill country, harrying the crops and awing the rude

peasants, amongst whom they left military posts along the great arteries of commerce. Thus they held the land, too often, in helpless subjection.

It had been so in Samson's day and in the youth of Samuel; and Saul had to fight hard for even a limited victory over these oppressors, who, indeed, surged once more over the whole of the Israelitish districts, after the defeat and death of the king and his son Jonathan, at the fatal battle of Mount Gilboa.

At the time of the incident of Goliath, the restless foe had sent its forces up the broad valley of Elah, between the towns of Socoh "the bushy," and Azekah "the newly tilled," flooding up, through this wide gate of the hills, till they pitched their camp at a spot known as Ephesdammim, "the staying of bloodshed." Here, the wady, or valley, is about three miles wide; a deep trench, with steep sides, the bed of the winter torrents, winding hither and thither down its centre, and thus forming a natural defence to any force drawn up on either side of it. The hills on each side are from seven hundred to eight hundred feet high, and run nearly east and west.

Always ready to meet attacks of the national enemy, Saul at once summoned, by messengers sent through the districts subject to him, as many of the people as he could collect,—the number, however, being apparently only inconsiderable,—and with these, and his central force of three thousand men, he marched towards the Philistines, and took up a position on the northern slope, facing that held by the foe. Clumps of bushes, and patches of barley coming to ripeness, covered the valley on both sides of the deep shingly bed of the torrent, now dry. At this point, the opposite hills were about a mile apart at their

crests, but their slopes run out so far, on each side, that the wady is only four hundred or five hundred yards broad at their foot.

It was then usual, as it was for many ages later, for famous warriors to come forward from either of two hostile armies, and challenge any of his foes to single combat; the result being regarded as a Divine judgment, and accepted as a decisive omen of victory or defeat. In this case, a gigantic figure—Goliath, “he of the shining armour”—stalked from the Philistine army, in helmet, jerkin, and greaves of glittering copper; a copper-headed lance hung behind him; a huge spear, iron-headed, in his hand; and a sword, worthy of his lofty stature, at his side. The length of the cubit being uncertain, it is impossible to speak positively of his height, but it must have been unusual; while his helmet, surmounted, we may fancy, by waving feathers, must have added greatly to his imposing proportions. He was one of a family marked, as a rule, by its tallness,—one of the last households of the Anakim, who were reputed a race of giants.

Striding near enough to the edge of the torrent-bed to let his words be heard over the camp of Israel, this embodied terror lifted up his great voice in taunts and curses against the Jews, their soldiers and their God, and this for forty successive days; no one taking up his challenge, so great was the awe at his appearance and bearing. No promises offered by Saul, to the hero who should slay such a foe, could make any one go out to meet him, though he heard that victory meant freedom from taxes and military service, abundant riches, and a princess for wife.

But on the fortieth day of this haughty defiance on the one side, and helpless paralysis on the other, young David

arrived in the camp with some parched corn, loaves, and curd cheeses for his brothers; for there was no commissariat; each militia-man having to get his own food from home. As he entered the lines, a loud shout attracted him; and, running to the front, he found it rose at the appearance of Goliath, on his daily advance, to taunt and insult his foes. The craven fear which had permitted this, stung the brave lad to the quick. If no one else would meet the Philistine, he was willing. Eliab, his brother, laughed scornfully at him, but he persisted, till word of his counter-defiance reached Saul. The stripling was ordered before him, and kindly attempts made to dissuade him, but he was firm. Jehovah had enabled him, unaided, to kill a lion and a bear, trying to carry off some of his flock, and He could, and would, deliver him from the hand of this blaspheming, uncircumcised Philistine. He would not even put on armour. That of Saul was too large for him, and, besides, he was unused to such trappings. He would trust in his own resources. Wearing only his shepherd's coat of sheepskin or coarse linen, with a rude wallet hanging at his side, his shepherd's stick in his hand, and a goat's-hair sling, he was, forthwith, outside the rude protection, before the Jewish camp, on his way to the towering champion who had defied the living God.

His rashness was only in appearance. Able to sling a stone with the most certain precision and great force,—for he guided his flock by his sling, as is still done in Palestine,—he was, indeed, more than a match for his enemy. But the sight of such an opponent was, in the eyes of Goliath, an immeasurable insult. Was he a dog, to be beaten off by a stick? Let David come on, and he would give him for food to the ravens overhead. The

deep trench had now been reached, and some rounded small stones picked up from it were put in the wallet, one, also, being laid in the sling. A few minutes more, and he had climbed the farther bank, and stood face to face with the furious giant, who now rushed at his insignificant assailant. But he did not get far. The sling whirled round the head of David, and sent its stone deep into the brow of the Philistine, the only spot of him exposed. Struck senseless, he fell headlong. A moment more, and his sword was out of its sheath, and his head cut off, while he still lay unconscious. Weakness, with intelligence, had triumphed, as usual, over mere brute force. God had favoured the stripling who had honoured His name. The Philistine army, accepting the omen, fled, and were pursued by Israel, now plucking up courage, when David had set them the example. Napoleon's saying, that an army of deer, led by a lion, is better than an army of lions led by a deer, was illustrated. David's career as a personage famous in Israel had begun.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

No character in Scripture is more fascinating than that of Jonathan. His friendship for David is, in truth, a poem, so entirely did he forget the thought of self, in his love for the son of Jesse, though he knew that he would be supplanted by him in the kingdom naturally his by inheritance.

The first meeting of the two was well fitted to kindle admiration for the young Bethlehemite; but there must have been other attractions than the fame of a great exploit, to draw out the strong affection David at once excited in the heart of Jonathan. Both were heroes; both had done great deeds,—the one in the fight with Goliath, the other in the wonderfully daring attack on the Philistines at Michmash. The sympathy of a heroic nature common to both must thus have drawn them together; but there must have been a winningness in David's look and bearing, to make so entire a conquest of Jonathan's loving soul.

The two friends saw each other on the day of the victory over Goliath. Led by Abner from the field to the presence of Saul, with the huge head of the Philistine still in his hand, David, bareheaded, in a simple peasant's tunic, his "fair countenance" gleaming with excitement, his splendid eyes full of the light of battle, and his rich auburn curls encircling his head like gold, must have

looked fit to win any heart. But it was not till he had told his artless story to Saul, so modest, so full of religious emotion, that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul" of the young shepherd, so that "Jonathan loved him as his own soul," or as David himself, after his friend's death, expressed it, "he loved him more than men love women."¹ Taking off his own war-tunic, he put it on him, and insisted on arming him with his sword and bow, and putting round him his own costly girdle. No greater honour could be shown one than thus to clothe him with a robe from the prince's own person; for in the East such a gift of an article of clothing "which the king useth to wear" has, in all ages, been held as a supreme sign of favour,—as we see in the case of Mordecai, in the Book of Esther.

The strength of the friendship thus suddenly formed was soon to be severely tested. Roused to morbid jealousy by the fame of David for his great exploit, Saul tried repeatedly to kill him, but Jonathan in every case took steps to give him warning. With a grand self-oblivion he thought of his friend as assuredly destined to be king, and touchingly prayed him, in return for the friendship he had received, to show equal kindness to one so true, should he live to see David triumph over all his enemies; adding that, should he be dead when this triumph came, he trusted he would continue kind to his children for ever. He knew that a new dynasty too often sought to secure itself, by murdering all the surviving members of that which it supplanted, and pledged David by their common God, that this would not be the case toward his own descendants.

¹ 2 Sam. i. 26.

The two friends parted with the most touching endearments. "As soon as the lad" who had collected the arrows "was gone," we are told, "David rose from beside the heap of stones,"¹ behind which he was in hiding, "and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times; and they kissed one another, and wept one with another until David exceeded;" that is, till David's weeping grew overpowering. "And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn, both of us, in the name of Jehovah, saying, The Lord shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, for ever."

For years from this time David's life was that of a fugitive, in one part or other of the southern and south-eastern uplands of Palestine. Jonathan saw him first again at Ziph, on the dry chalky downs south of Hebron, where the landscape sinks in a great step, toward Beer-sheba. It is pre-eminently a "thirsty land;" for the rain filters at once through the porous chalk, leaving the surface arid, and scorched by the fierce sun. A plot had been laid to betray David, but Jonathan, ever faithful to his friend, took care to forewarn him. Seeking him out, in the stunted scrub on the hills where he was hiding, he "strengthened his hand in God," telling him, moreover, that he need not fear, for Saul would not be able to find him. He knew, added he, that David would be king over Israel; and, with touching love and humility—with the humility, indeed, that is born of true love—said that, for himself, he would be the next below him, and that, also, Saul, his father, knew this. In fond discourse and mutual indulgence of their love, the two spent, we may be sure,

¹ Septuagint.

as long a time as was safe; but the parting came at last, yet they watched each other while either could be seen, and then went their several ways, to meet no more.

Years passed, till, at length, on the rough sides of Mount Gilboa lay the corpses of Saul and three of his sons, of whom one was Jonathan. He had fallen, as became so noble a hero, on the field of battle. His bow, famous in Israel, became a show in the cities of the Philistines; his body, with that of his father, was ignominiously nailed up on the wall of Bethshean, whence, however, the two were presently carried off, by friendly hands from over the Jordan, for becoming burial.

The lament of David over his friend is enshrined for ever in a poem preserved for us in the first chapter of Second Samuel. Many years passed before David carried out his promise of protecting the children of his friend, but he did so in the end. Inquiries resulted in the discovery of a son of his, Mephibosheth, who, though a child when his father perished, and, then, lamed in both feet, by his nurse's letting him fall as he was being carried off to safety, had grown to manhood, and, himself, had a son, Mica.¹ He had been taken over the Jordan and tenderly cared for, but was now removed to Jerusalem, where he "did eat continually at the king's table," and enjoyed his grateful favour and protection.

But David's nature was less noble than that of Jonathan. Towards the close of his reign, his weakness in the government of his family, and the penalty exacted by Providence for his awful sin in murdering Uriah the Hittite so treacherously, and for an end so ignoble, led to the rebellion of Absalom. Mephibosheth would fain have fled from Jeru-

¹ 2 Sam. ix. 12.

saalem with him; but a treacherous slave-steward, Ziba, had gone off with the ass on which he must, on account of his lameness, have ridden, and thus he had to stay behind. But from that day he “neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes,” so deep was his grief for David’s misfortunes.

On the very day of the king’s flight, however, while he was still only a little way past the top of the hill Olivet, and thus close to Jerusalem, the traitor Ziba met him with two ass-loads of bread, fruit, and wine, and took the opportunity of slandering his master, by saying that he stayed behind, in hopes that he might be raised to his father’s throne, instead of David. Forthwith, on the mere word of the traitor, David confiscated all that belonged to Mephibosheth, and made it over to Ziba. On the defeat of Absalom, and the aged king’s return in triumph to Jerusalem, the ill-used prince sought his face, with all the marks of his continuous mourning on him, and told the story of Ziba’s villainy. It was beyond question; but, incredible though it may seem, all the satisfaction he obtained—son of Jonathan as he was—consisted in the rough answer and shamefully unjust decision: “Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land.” Assuredly Jonathan would not have acted thus to the only son of David, and he a helpless cripple, cheated and vilified by a shameless slave.

DAVID SPARING SAUL.

THE prudence of David for a time preserved him from danger, after Goliath's defeat and death, but he was ultimately forced to flee for his life. His first refuge was, strange to say, with his enemies, the Philistines, to whom he must have represented himself as now the enemy of his people, ready to turn against them his skill and bravery in war. But his position, from the first, in this dangerous region, was insecure; and it was only by feigning madness, which was held in some way a Divine possession, sacred from injury, that he preserved his life till an opportunity for flight offered itself. Stealing away, at last, up the great pass or valley of the Terebinth, the readiest ascent into the hills from Gath, he hid himself in the caves of a rounded hill, about five hundred feet high, at its head,—the hill of Adullam. The sides of the valley at this point, including the slope of the hill, are full of caves, still used for dwellings and sheepfolds by the shepherds of the district. Here he was joined, before long, by a number of his countrymen, who, for various reasons, often not very creditable, had been forced to flee from their homes in Israel. Some of his own family, moreover, especially his nephews, found him out, and came to him; and also some famous warriors, who, from different causes, had left Saul. Gad the prophet also came, perhaps from Ramah.

Meanwhile, the king's fury against his supposed rival grew so unbounded that, in a paroxysm of wild rage and madness, he slew the whole colony of priests at Nob because their chief had given David shelter, and shown him friendliness before his final escape. One, alone, Abiathar, was able to save his life by flight; but he had with him the sacred insignia of the High Priest, his father, who had been slain, and forthwith carried them, to Saul's great chagrin, to David, with whom he henceforth stayed.

A short visit to Moab, to put his aged father and mother, who also had joined him, in a place of safety, closed the period passed at Adullam. The fugitive's next hiding-place was in the wood of Hareth, nine miles north-west of Hebron, where he was lurking when the priests were slaughtered by Saul at Nob. But his new retreat was, also, soon known by the king, so that he had to seek safety elsewhere. This time, he betook himself to the neighbourhood of Ziph, about four miles below Hebron; an upland region full of hill caves; the landscape a waste of barren swells and valleys, nearly three thousand feet above the sea. Here, in a waterless, treeless region, with only scrub, at most, on some of the slopes; the eye ranging over successive levels of the grey hills, as they sink, in great steps, towards the desert of Sinai; with the Philistine plains far below, on the west, and the repulsive tangle of desolate ravines and rounded uplands, forming the wilderness of Judea stretching away to the east, some hundreds of feet beneath, David might have hoped for safety, but did not find it. His retreat was soon discovered, and a large force was sent to take him; but, having timely warning from

his true friend, Jonathan, whom he has met for the last time, he escaped to Maon, about five miles farther south, and hid in the ravines and caves of the hill there, which rises as high as the cliff of Ziph. But, though closely pursued, he escaped now, also; Saul being called off by news of a fresh inroad of the Philistines. His next retreat was in the caves of the precipitous cliffs of Engedi,—“the spring of the goats,”—on the west edge of the Dead Sea. A path cut in the precipitous rocks is, even now, the only means of descent from the tableland above; a single false step, at any time, threatening to hurl one to the bottom, which is two thousand feet below the top.

Even to this wild and dangerous retreat, however, the maddened jealousy of Saul pursued David. But he was destined to meet a rebuke of his hostility, in a way he little expected. Having, one day, withdrawn into the shadow of one of the numerous caves with which the heights of Engedi, like all the hilly parts of Palestine, abound, he had, in doing so, unawares, put himself completely in the power of his intended victim, who, with his band of followers, happened, at the very time, to be hiding in the farther depths of the cavern. Nothing could have been easier than to have killed the king, and David's men would fain have got permission to do so. But Saul was God's anointed, and thus sacred; and David, apart from this, would have set a bad precedent, if he, who himself hoped one day to reign, had taken advantage of an opportunity to murder his predecessor. Still, he would use his chance in a way that would plead for his innocence of anything like treason, and, perhaps, calm the passions of Saul against him. Stealing noise-

lessly toward the king, who, being between the light and him, could be seen, while he, himself, could not pierce the darkness behind him, he cut off, with his knife or sword, a piece of the skirt of Saul's cloak which was most easily reached, and let him leave the cave without injury. When, however, he had gone some distance, David came out, and, standing in the open, hailed the king, showing him the piece of his cloak just cut off, and asking whether there was any reason to hunt down one who, under circumstances so favourable to violence, had shown himself nobly loyal. There was no resisting such an appeal. Saul had received good for evil, and on a nature in which there is anything worthy, this always makes a powerful impression. Weeping aloud, he owned that David was a better man than himself. It was clear, he added, that God intended to give him the kingdom. Would he only promise that, on coming to the throne, he would not cut off his family? Willingly swearing this, the two parted, in peace for the time. David, however, would not trust himself in the king's neighbourhood, feeling sure that some fit of jealous madness would soon break out again, and therefore stayed in the wilderness.

Nor was he in error. Before long, the hatred of the king toward him was raging as fiercely as ever, and a second force, larger than that by which he had formerly been pursued, was launched against the fugitive; Saul himself going with it. The treacherous Ziphites once more volunteered to betray David into his hands, but he was too watchful to let himself be snared. Noting, from some high point, exactly where Saul's forces had rested for the night, within a rough defence of scrub

supplied by the locality, the hunted one descended from the hills, trusting to the carelessness of encampments in the East, and stole, unperceived, to the very centre of the host, where Saul lay asleep, surrounded by Abner and his personal guards. The royal spear was stuck in the ground, as a badge of rank, at the head of the sleeping king, and a cruse of water, bound to the saddle of his ass by day, lay near. Carrying off the long spear and the cruse, he climbed a neighbouring hill again, refusing to take advantage of the opportunity given him, to slay Saul as he lay in his slumber. The confusion round the king at daybreak, when it was found that the spear and the water-skin were gone, must have been intense, but it would be heightened when David was seen, calling from the height beyond, and proclaiming his exploit. Taunting Abner with his want of care of the king, he also appealed to Saul himself, to cease pursuing one so unmistakably loyal, nor could the force of the proof be withstood. The king returned to Gibeah, and David remained for the time in peace. Thus, for the second time, the victim of cruel wrong requited it with magnanimous loyalty,—literally returning good for evil, and, in doing so, leaving a lesson for all time.

DEATH OF SAUL.

THE defeat of the Philistines in the Terebinth valley, when Goliath was slain by David, freed the Jewish hills for a time from these dreaded invaders. But they were keen traders as well as brave soldiers, and could not submit, permanently, to an exclusion from the great lines of caravan travel, which ran through the territory of Israel. One of these, stretching across the centre of the country, through the Wady Sunt and the Wady Kelt, past Michmash, to the Jordan, had given occasion to Jonathan and his armour-bearer's attack on one of the military posts guarding it, which brought about the first defeat of the Philistines. The inroad during which Goliath was slain was an attempt to recover the position thus lost, but it, also, had been repelled. There was another trade-route, however, along the Plain of Esdraelon, and across the Jordan, at Bethshean, which tempted the pertinacious enemy to still further effort.

David had been forced, by Saul's frantic jealousy, to flee once more to Gath, where his band of six hundred men, now skilled in war, doubtless secured him a better welcome than he had received on his former visit. He might have been of vital importance to Saul in the approaching campaign, had he been allowed to remain in Israel; his military genius counting for much on the side of the king, had he been allowed to display it.

The position of the exile was a difficult one; for, as a

pretended enemy of Saul, he would naturally be expected to fight against him, on behalf of the Philistines. Fearing this, he asked and obtained the gift of Ziklag, a distant frontier post, twenty miles south of Beersheba, and fifty from Gath. Far away, on the edge of the great southern desolation of Et Tih, he would be safe from the jealousy of the Philistine chiefs, and able to make forays, at his pleasure, against the roving encampments which, from time to time, invaded the territory of Simeon and the southern parts of Judah. It was proposed by the Philistines, when the new campaign against Israel was being planned, to employ so notable a leader, who had a band of men so famous, under him. But, in the end, the chiefs distrusted him, fearing he would show treachery; and he was thus, happily, left free from the pain of even apparently joining against his own nation.

The levies from the Philistine towns and territory marched against Saul by the sea-shore route, fearing the hill passes, which had been the scene of so many disasters to them in past years. Advancing, along the Plain of Sharon, to the end of the Carmel range, they had only to get round that, to be in the wide Plain of Esdraelon, where they could use their chariots; the special object of dread to the Israelites. They thus, also, reached, at once, the very heart of the Jewish territory, while, at the same time, they forced Saul to meet them where his force could fight with the least advantage, and at a great distance from their homes,—a matter of supreme importance with a levy like that which followed him, each man of which had to be provided for by his own household or circle.

Pressing onwards, the Philistines encamped, with a strong force of infantry, cavalry, and chariots, at the east

end of the plain, so as to command the road by which Saul must advance from the south. His raw militia, hastily summoned, was no match for the invader; but, such as they were, they bravely followed the king, and found means to cross the narrow ravine which separates the hills of Samaria from those of Gilboa,—a mass of bare rounded heights which fill up the greater part of the east end of Esdraelon. As he could do nothing on level ground with his infantry, which was his only force, Saul wisely kept to the Gilboa hills, and awaited an attack. He was now a comparatively old man, and his mental excitement so long strained through his jealousy of David, had unnerved him, so that he was not what he once had been. Moreover, he was in the position so trying, in the view of men in those days, of having no priest or oracle to consult before beginning battle. He had slain the priests at Nob, and the only one who escaped had taken away the mysterious breastplate of the High Priest, with the Urim and Thummim, and was with David, his fancied enemy. There seemed no help for him from the heavens. In his despair, he tried to bring on dreams by night, in the hope that God would direct him, by some vision thus vouchsafed him. But he could not sleep, and did not dream. Years before, he had tried to root out sorcerers from the land, but, having learned that one still lived in the neighbourhood, he determined to visit her, that he might have counsel with the unseen world in this way, if in no other. To reach her he had to make his way through the Philistine outposts, to the hamlet of Endor, on the north side of Gilboa,—a spot full of caves, any of which might give a fitting home to a professor of the black arts. Disguising himself, he stole in the darkness to her dwelling, and

begged that, if she could do so, Samuel might be brought to him, by her incantations. What followed is very mysterious, but, in some way unknown to us, he heard from a phantom, whom he recognised as the prophet, words of awful import. He had forsaken God, and God had forsaken him; and, before another night had come, he and his sons would be in the regions of the dead, with the Shade who addressed him. Such a preparation for the battle, added to the extreme prostration of mental anxiety, and inability to take necessary food, was, itself, enough to make defeat almost certain.

Next day came the catastrophe. The slopes leading to the hills were open to the Philistines; the ravines and crags of bleak hills, alone, were held by the Israelites. The attack began in the morning, and the Hebrews fought bravely all day, keeping off their assailants wondrously. But they could not, in the end, withstand the charges of horse, foot, and chariot, incessantly renewed, and ultimately broke up and fled. Three sons of Saul—Jonathan, the eldest, Abinadab, and Malchishua—were left dead on the hills. Saul, still wearing his royal turban and bracelet, and apparently wounded by an arrow, found himself alone with his faithful armour-bearer, and saw that he would be taken prisoner, which meant his being put to a shameful death before all his enemies. Leaning heavily, therefore, on his spear, to court death at his own hands, he fell mortally wounded, and asked his armour-bearer to give him the last blow, to end his sufferings. A wild Amalekite, wandering over the field in quest of plunder, afterward claimed to have given him this death-stroke; but it seems as if it had been only a vain boast, and that Saul had finally killed himself by his own sword.

The defeat was terrible. The flower of Israel lay on the field; and, worst of all, for her humiliation, the bodies of Saul and Jonathan were carried off by the Philistines, and, after being beheaded, were nailed up on the walls of Bethshean, near the field of battle. A brave act of the men of Jabesh-gilead, however, rescued them from this indignity. But the head of the king, with his arms, and the bow of Jonathan, were sent to Philistia, and hung up in the temples there. The wrath of God had fallen heavily on the house of Saul. Its sun had set in blood for ever!

RETROSPECT OF SAUL'S LIFE.

THE reign of Saul was a turning-point in Jewish history. About four hundred years had elapsed since the death of Joshua,—a period as long as from the discovery of America by Columbus, to the present day. During all that time the tribes had been isolated from each other, and severally, independent, except during the intervals in which some had united, in a measure, under a Judge. This, however, was an anomalous and partial form of government, ceasing at the death of the individual ruler, and leaving the nation, as before, a mere set of clans, under their patriarchal government of elders and sheiks. Civilisation and progress were well-nigh impossible, in such an elementary condition of society; and it was, moreover, easy to attack and subdue tribes thus isolated, and almost incapable of combined action. Meanwhile, the nations round Israel had grown stronger, by having centralised governments. Kings had taken the place of chiefs, and wielded the whole power of the communities over which they reigned; while the great desert tribes had grown so formidable, as to overrun Palestine, from time to time, and waste the country. In central Israel a movement had, therefore, sprung up, from the time of Gideon,—about a hundred and fifty years before Saul,—in favour of national union under one leader, who should, in some measure, be like the kings of the other nations

of Palestine. It had, however, after a time, died away, and Israel, broken and fragmentary, lay under the heel of the energetic Philistines from the sea-coast plains, till Samuel rose as a dictator, and brought temporary relief. It had evidently been the hope of the country, that the power thus wielded with so much benefit, should pass to the prophet's sons; but their character, in the end, made this wish be abandoned.

That there should have been a universal demand for a king, to take up the office held, as judge, by Samuel, was, thus, the embodiment of a desire felt for more than a century, and only deferred so long, by the conservatism of Oriental life. Yet it was no less natural that, to Samuel, this cry of the tribes should seem revolutionary in the worst sense. To him, the divinely-ordained constitution of Israel, was a government directly by God, through some prophet or other leader, specially appointed by Heaven, as Moses, Joshua, or he, himself, had been. A hereditary monarchy would be a distinct violation of this. But the helplessness and disaster of the past ages, since Joshua, the force of example in neighbouring states, and the altered circumstances of the times, left Samuel powerless to influence the public opinion of the day, and Saul was in the end appointed.

The character of the new ruler would have made him popular among any other people than Israel. So modest that, after his anointing, he went back to labour on his father's land, and hid himself even when, at a later date, he had been publicly chosen by acclamation as king; he was, while his mind remained sound, no less free from the cruelty or crime so often disgracing Oriental monarchy. He had no such murder as that of Uriah the Hittite

with which to accuse himself, or of the sons of Rizpah, and no such shameful episode in his life as that of Bathsheba. Yet he was capable of wild deeds of blood, after his mind had been unhinged by jealousy of David. The massacres at Gibeon and Nob were the outbursts of a distempered mind,—the one from an insane idea that he must purify Israel from a race condemned by God in ancient times; the other, from the frenzy of a wild jealousy, so terrible in its mad paroxysms, that it is described as possession by an evil spirit. That his rule as a whole was gracious, and his personal character attractive, is shown by the loyalty of Israel to his house, under his son Ishbosheth. Even the terrible defeat on Gilboa, could not extinguish a widespread devotion to his memory and lineage.

Saul was religious after his own fashion, but it was not in that way which his extraordinary relations to Samuel demanded. Although king in name, and responsible to the nation, as such, he was required, in fact, to be simply the lieutenant of Samuel, so long as the prophet lived, obeying his commands to the letter, even in the face of all that might seem ordinary prudence or pity. One offence for which he was condemned, was his not waiting for the prophet even after the end of the seven days, named by Samuel as the term for which he should do so; the excuse for his taking action when the week had expired, being the very natural one, that the delay had already resulted in the melting away of nearly all the force, on which the safety of the kingdom depended. It was claimed that he ought to have obeyed by waiting even beyond the seven days, but it is easy to understand, how he might well have expected his independent action

on so small a scale, to be condoned by the public benefit it secured.

Not less difficult for ordinary minds must it have been, to avoid the other sin, which finally brought on the king formal rejection from the throne. His victory over the Amalekites was a great triumph for Israel, delivering it from a dangerous and powerful enemy. He had been ordered utterly to extirpate them, man, woman, and child, and to destroy even the cattle and sheep, which must have amounted to many thousands in a great Arab tribe. Vanity to have their emir—Agag; a man, it appears, of singular beauty and height—grace his triumph, and unwillingness to prevent his people, who had so long been plundered by the Philistines, from replenishing their pastures with part of the booty; weakness of nature, in short, which shrank from the full terribleness of the prophet's curse,—brought on his doom. He was not stern and hard enough, when in his softer moods, to be a king such as Samuel wished.

One pities the poor, fated hero, as he stumbled on, from one mistake and calamity to another, after the prophet had finally denounced him. Was he charged with not being zealous for Jehovah? He would show that the charge was unfounded, and he tried to do so, in his wild way, by hunting down all the sorcerers in the land, and by killing the Gibeonites, as of heathen blood. He had no High Priest or Urim to guide him, no prophet to see, instead of the oracle; for, in his madness, he had slaughtered the priests at Nob, and the prophets had fled, or, at least, were not with him. He had no light but that of his own clouded mind and broken heart. Yet his family clung round him, lovingly, to the

end. There was no revolt of Absalom in his case, but he and three of his sons fell, together, on their last battle-field. That he should have sought the black art of the sorcerer at Endor was natural, in such an age, for one whom Heaven had forsaken; but, after all, he only did so, to try if he could not call up Samuel, who had denounced him, and seek counsel with him, now that the grave might have been supposed to have buried all the sternness and bitter memories of the past.

RISE OF DAVID.

THE death of Saul and three of his sons, in the disastrous battle of Gilboa, at last closed the long outlawry of David, who, at the time, kept his headquarters in Ziklag, a small place in the far south, among the waterless uplands of the "Negeb." His grief for the fallen king and for Jonathan was sincere and deep,—especially, of course, for the latter, who had been so true a friend to him in all his troubles. He and those around him filled the air with wailing, rent their clothes, and wept aloud, like true Orientals, at the appalling news, David, besides, commemorating so sad an event by a touching ode, preserved in our Bible.

It was hard to tell what to do next, after this outburst of sorrow. That one who had twice fled to the national enemy—the Philistines—should come back to his own countrymen at once, was impossible. Though the slayer of Goliath, and once the pride of Israel, there was no voice now raised in favour of David's accession to the vacant throne, nor even an invitation to come back, as a noted servant of the state. He stayed, therefore, for a time, in the far south, but shrewdly took steps to form a party in his favour, by sending gifts—from the spoils of the Bedouin tribes—to the different towns of the district, including Hebron, nominally in acknowledgment of favour shown him in the past. This politic step was fruitful. Men began to talk of him again, recalling his many claims

to their respect and admiration. It was remembered that he had been honoured by the great prophet Samuel; that the prophet's God was with him, and the High Priest Abiathar, with the Urim and Thummim; his hymns and songs passed from lip to lip; his marriage to a daughter of Saul, his great deeds in war, from the time, when, as a youth, he had braved Goliath, were recounted in his favour. Above all, however, the fact that he had round him a band of six hundred veterans, who might be of the greatest value as a protection in such times, and whose vengeance they might well dread, if any slight were shown to their leader, was of great weight. Yet the first open step to public recognition came from David himself. Having consulted the oracle, he determined to go to Hebron, uninvited, and to make it his future headquarters. Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Jebusites; and, thus, Hebron was the chief Jewish town,—for Samaria was not built for a very long time after; and Shechem, in the middle of the country, was altogether inferior, in its national dignity, to the city of Abraham. He and his two wives, therefore, with his six hundred braves and their families, migrated to Hebron, then, no doubt, as it still is, a small place, and thus completely in the hands of so large a force.

Saul, though a Benjamite, had represented Ephraim and its allied tribes much more than he had Judah, which stood aloof from him, from immemorial jealousy of the haughty heirs of Joseph, who, as such, claimed the headship of Israel. To elevate David to local rule, and thus make a bid for the leadership of the nation, was possible, while the throne was not filled up; and, hence, David soon found himself chosen as their king, by an assembly

held at Hebron. But, as the north and centre of the land were in the hands of the Philistines, he was a king with a mere trifle of territory. Judah, however, having lain out of the reach of the last war, was the strongest of the tribes, for the time,—multitudes having perished in the other districts, and still greater numbers having fled beyond the Jordan.

Seven years and a half were spent by David in Hebron, as king of the one tribe of Judah. During these, however, he was ceaselessly busy in planning a wider success. As one source of future influence, politic marriages were made by him; polygamy, with all its evils, being thus sanctioned, to the great injury, in after times, of his dynasty and of the nation. One wife, the mother of Absalom, was taken from the wild region of Geshur, beyond the Jordan; but of three other new wives, married during the Hebron reign, we know little more than the names.

Meanwhile, the son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, and the fourth son of Saul, Eshbaal, “the man of Baal,” afterwards known as Ishbosheth “the man of shame” or “humiliation,” were beyond the Jordan. The former, being still young, remained secluded; the other was proclaimed by Abner, a cousin of Saul, and a great soldier, successor to the fallen king, who was still widely loved, and spoken of fondly as “the roe, or gazelle” of Israel,—that creature being the emblem of swiftness and grace, beauty and gentleness. For his capital, the ancient Mahanaim beyond the Jordan, where two hosts of angels had been seen in vision by Jacob, as his protectors, was fitly chosen. Step by step, Abner won back much of the territory of Saul for his master, who was now thirty-five years old, but unequal to the difficulties of his position.

In five years he was nominally lord of all Israel, except the tribe of Judah, which, having chosen David for its own king, thus virtually seceded from the nation, and proclaimed its independence. Such a state of things naturally led to trouble. The old jealousy of Judah and Ephraim broke out dangerously. It was impossible to prevent the mutual excitement from passing into civil war.

The vigour and ability of David proved more than a match, however, in this painful strife, for the greater resources and strength of his opponents, led by the captain of a weak and irresolute phantom king. Judah steadily extended its power, east, west, and north, till the whole territory as far as Gibeon owned the sway of Hebron. To save the effusion of blood, Abner now proposed that the issue should be determined by a duel of twelve men from each side; but the Benjamites selected to try the fortune of battle with twelve of David's men, using their swords at the same moment as their adversaries used theirs, the whole twenty-four at once fell mortally wounded. A fierce conflict followed, in which Abner's men were defeated and fled. In the flight, Asahel, one of David's nephews, refusing to cease the pursuit of Abner, was reluctantly killed by him, and thus the bitterness of the feud was increased. But the end was approaching. Though dependent on Abner, Ishbosheth was foolish enough to quarrel with him, and thus lead him to pass over to the side of David. Yet he had little time left to serve either; for Joab, the brother of the slain Asahel, treacherously murdered him, on his visit to Hebron, to pay homage to his new lord.

Left without the support indispensable to him, Ish-

bosheth would, no doubt, have speedily given way to his rival, but this degradation was spared him. Two Benjamins from the neighbourhood of Gibeon, whose citizens had been so cruelly massacred by Saul, basely murdered the poor king, at once to carry out the blood-feud for his father's crime, and in hope of winning favour from David; but they only brought about their own death. The way being now cleared for David's favour with Israel, the collective tribes at last gave in their adhesion to him, and he was solemnly accepted by all Israel, at a great assembly of the nation held at Hebron, with unwonted rejoicings. Nothing could be more propitious than the opening of the new reign. Saul's only legitimate heir was Mephibosheth,¹ and David united the suffrages of north and south; thus welding all Israel, for the first time, into an organic whole. Yet the task before him was great; for the new dynasty had to meet and overcome not only the enemies of past times, but others which were ere long to take arms against it.

¹ Besides Mephibosheth, the lame and helpless son of Jonathan, there were left two sons of Saul and his concubine Rizpah, and five sons of Michal, the daughter of Saul, and Adriel, to whom she had been handed over after she was taken from David, her husband. But these stood necessarily in an inferior relation to the throne than direct or legitimate children would have held. In such an age, amidst Eastern ideas of succession, which are not settled as with us, only an able soldier, the lawful son or grandson of Saul, would be recognised as having any personal claims, and Mephibosheth, as a deformed, powerless being, would himself have shrunk from being king in such times.

DAVID AT JERUSALEM.

THE second installation of David, as king, at Hebron, had raised him, at the age of thirty-eight, to the throne of the united tribes. The only legal heir of Saul was helpless, so that no choice remained for Ephraim and the northern section of Israel, but to give their adhesion to one, who though not of their own number, had been famous since his youth, as a warrior, and in other ways. Judah was no less ready to join in an election, which raised a son of their tribe to the headship of the race. For the moment, the rivalry between it and Ephraim was let sleep, to awake, however, fiercely enough, two generations later, in the form of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes.

The first great act of the new king marked his statesmanship. Hebron, lying on the slope of its mountain valley in the south of the country, was too far from the centre to be a fitting capital. But in the territory of the small tribe of Benjamin, Saul's own clan, a position offered itself which, besides many natural advantages, had the great one of being free from any such associations of local and sectional importance, as Hebron. It was neutral ground; for, as yet, it was held by the Jebusites, an old Canaanite race. David, therefore, resolved to make it his metropolis. But it was no easy task to get possession of a city which was almost impregnable by its position, cut off, except on the north, by deep valleys, from the

country around. A summons to surrender peaceably was met with a taunting refusal. Even the blind and the lame, it was insultingly answered, were enough to keep the new king out of a place so strong. Perpendicular escarpments, cut in the south side of Mount Zion, and still seen in the English enclosure there, with cisterns in a platform below, to supply the town with water, and a stairway cut in the hill, show how well fortified Jebus must have been. There was even a great shaft sunk through the hill, leading down, by steps, to a covered aqueduct, which brought water, underground, from the Fountain of the Virgin, in the valley east of the town, and thus secured the population from the danger of thirst; and a second watercourse, now buried deep below the rubbish of ages, from the one spring in the town hill, flowing, then, through a deep valley between Mount Moriah and Mount Zion. But bravery and quick-witted readiness were equal to the seizure even of Jebus. Joab, at the head of a resolute storming-party, climbed up the shaft at the south-east of Zion, having got access, one knows not how, and took the place by surprise, overpowering resistance before it could be organised.¹

David had now won for the nation a city which, from that time, has been famous above all others. As ages passed, the Jew became passionately proud of it, not for its historical associations so much, as that it was, in his eyes, the "habitation for the mighty God of Jacob," from the hour when the Tabernacle was raised in its midst, to be afterwards superseded by the Temple. It was "the

¹ I have assumed that this shaft was then excavated, as it may well have been. There is nothing else to which the word translated "gutter" (2 Sam. v. 8) can apply.

city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." For nearly three thousand years the eyes of every Jew throughout the world have turned to it, as often as he paid his devotions to Jehovah.

One of David's first acts, after the conquest of his new capital,—from this time known as Jerusalem, apparently "the city of the god Salim"—was to repair its defences and build in it a palace for himself. The Jews, however, were never famous for skill in architecture, and their country did not afford timber suitable. The King of Tyre, an admirer of the new king, was, therefore, engaged to send cedar from Lebanon, and masons and carpenters for the building, which, no doubt, had much in common with Assyrian ideas, as the Phœnician arts were largely copied from those of the great city on the Tigris.

Wars with the Philistines for a time put an end to the further adornment of the metropolis; but in the end that warlike race was thoroughly broken; Gath itself, its chief city, passing into the hands of David, and tribute being imposed, ignominiously, on the former lords of Israel. The land was thus, for a time, left in peace, and this calm, David determined to utilise for an object supremely dear to him, as head of the people of God,—the bringing up of the ark, from the obscurity in which it had long been, as it were, buried, to a fitting resting-place in Jerusalem. Arrangements were, therefore, made to carry it from Kirjath-jearim, on the outskirts of the western hills of Judah, where it had remained since the Philistines gave it back, when visited with heavy judgments for retaining it. A great tent, or tabernacle, was prepared for it on some part of Mount Zion, the eastern side of the city, known, after its conquest, as the "city of David."

To honour so great an event, all the tribes were summoned to be present, and crowds from every part of the land hastened to obey. "We heard men say at Ephratah, in the south of the land, and we found them repeat it in the woody Lebanon,"—says the writer of one of the Psalms¹—"Let us go into His tabernacle: let us worship at His footstool." Once in Jerusalem, men could "appear before God in Zion." The nation would have a great central glory round which, at all times, to rally.

There had never been such a festival in Israel. Many came to it from the farthest south, and not a few from Hamath, in the valley of the Orontes, two hundred and fifty miles, as the crow flies, north of Jerusalem.

A new cart having been provided, the ark was duly put on it, and the oxen which were to draw it, stepped forward with the precious burden. It was an error, however, to move it by such means; for the law ordered that it should be borne only by consecrated Levites. It had rested, for many years, in its lowly home, but now, as it left it, a vast multitude followed in wild excitement of joy. Bands of singers praised God, and the music of harps, castanets, tambourines, clarions, and cymbals, filled the air with jubilation; David himself setting the example of enthusiasm both with voice and instrument. At last they came to a smooth space used as a threshing-floor; but as they reached it, the oxen unfortunately stumbled, and the ark seemed in danger of being shaken off the rude cart. Uzzah, one of the sons of its guardian at Kirjath-jearim, fearing it would fall, put out his hand to save it; but as he did so, he fell dead,—perhaps, as the Greek Bible seems to hint, by a flash of lightning. Dismayed at a catastrophe

¹ Ps. cxxxii.

so evidently from God, nothing more was done except to turn the awful burden aside, to the house of Obed-edom, a Levite.

Having lain there three months without evil results, it was resolved to bring it to Jerusalem. But, this time, it was borne by Levites. Nearly a thousand of the most eminent priests and Levites took part in the solemnity. Moving on amidst chants, sacrifices, and the flourishes of trumpets blown by mighty warriors, it at last reached the capital, where all the great of the land, and a vast multitude, awaited its arrival. Its entrance into the city seemed almost that of Jehovah himself. A choir of Levites, on approaching the gates, demanded that they should be thrown open before God :

“ Lift up your heads, O ye gates !
Be ye lift up, ye ancient doors ;
That the King of glory may enter in.”

But the warders, hesitating, chanted back :

“ Who is this King of glory ?”

Then came the triumphal reply :

“ Jehovah, strong and mighty ;
Jehovah, mighty in battle.”

The two choirs now united in a grand chorus, as the gate flew wide, and the ark entered :

“ Lift up your heads, O ye gates !
Lift them up, ye ancient doors ;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory ?
Jehovah of hosts,—
He is the King of glory.”

Sacrifices on a great scale marked the entrance of the ark into the new Tabernacle, and then followed the music of a grand psalm¹ composed, for the occasion, by David, who closed the day's religious services by giving the people a priestly benediction, and dismissing them. Festivities, with the distribution of bread, flesh, and cakes of raisins, ended the glorious day. David had worn an ephod like a priest, and had joined in the dances before the ark, as he sang and played, in honour of Jehovah, and the spirit which moved him so greatly had been that of the vast assembly. It was a memorable event for Israel.

¹ 1 Chron. xvi. 8-36.

[The name Uru'salim, or Jerusalem, was that in use for the Holy City, at least as early as the fifteenth century before Christ. We see this in the correspondence of the Egyptian governor with the court at Tel Amarna, in the tablets discovered there. It seems to mean "The town of Salim," apparently the god of the ancient Jerusalem, and of the district round it.]

DAVID AS KING.

THE erection of the Tabernacle, or sacred tent, in Jerusalem, and the bringing to it the ark from Kirjath-jearim—"the wood-city"—must have marked the later half of David's reign; for his wars seem to have ended before this peaceful triumph. It would appear, however, that a tent no longer contented him as a centre of the religious worship of his people. It was the age of great temples. In the valley of the Nile, vast piles had, already, for many generations, attested the power of the priesthood and the devotion of the kings, though no sign of the enthusiasm of the people who toiled, in forced labour, to raise them. Babylonia had boasted of its great religious buildings for perhaps as long a period; for the reign of Sargon of Accad, which has left us a wonderful legacy of priestly literature, seems to have been as famous for the sanctuaries in which its hierarchy ministered. But other regions had not been so early civilised; and when, in any case, they developed into new kingdoms, a grand temple appeared a necessary sign of their greatness, as well as a fitting tribute to the divinity, by whom, as was thought, it had been secured. A monarchy without a temple seemed imperfect, in ages when Church and State were virtually identical, or, rather, when the State, as a rule, was subordinate to the Church. In antiquity, it must be remembered, religion played a far greater part, in the

public life of a nation, than it does in ours. Nothing could be done without an appeal to the god or gods worshipped. Sacrifices smoked perpetually on the altars; vows were incessantly being made or fulfilled; rites and ceremonies were the essence of religious life, and must be observed with the most minute accuracy, before any detail of public or private life could be safely undertaken.

All these motives were probably in David's mind when he resolved to signalise his reign by the erection of a temple to Jehovah, instead of the tent in which, ever since the days of the wilderness, the tribes had seen his peculiar dwelling-place.

As a faithful ally of the prophets, nothing could be done by the king without their being consulted. To Nathan, therefore, his special adviser, he took an opportunity of communicating his intention, telling him that it was a grief to him that he should live in a house, ornamented with the costly cedar-wood of Lebanon, while the ark of God dwelt within curtains. He must have gone into greater detail, but no more is told than his regret at the lowliness of the house of God, compared with his own. That he should desire to honour Jehovah in such a way, seemed, at the first mention of his proposal, in every way commendable, so that the prophet, forthwith, gave it his hearty approval, telling the king to do all that was in his heart, for the Lord was with him.

Farther reflection, however, led to doubts in the mind of Nathan, whether he had been justified in thinking that God, like himself, approved of the king's design, and this was confirmed by a vision granted to him in his sleep. The Divine voice seemed to him to dictate words to be used to the king at their next interview, giving reasons

why, after all, he should be contented to let matters remain as they were, during his lifetime. These intimations from God, thus conveyed to the sleeper, he, therefore, took an early opportunity of communicating to David. God, he told him, had deigned to speak on the question of the proposed temple, but had pronounced against it. He had not dwelt in any such building, during all the four hundred years that had passed since their forefathers left Egypt, but had been content to "walk in a tent;" nor had He ever, at any time, spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel,¹ whom He had commanded to feed His chosen people, saying, "Why build ye not Me a house of cedar?" The prophet was, therefore, to tell David, that Jehovah had directed him to say: "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts,"—a name which does not occur in the earlier books of the Bible,—“I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.” The message further gave an assurance that God would appoint a place for Israel, and plant them securely and permanently in it, so that they would no more lead a nomadic life like that of the wilderness, and would, likewise, protect them against their enemies, so that disastrous times like those of the judges, or those before David's own final triumph over his adversaries, would not again visit them.

This assurance might have sufficed to mitigate the disappointment at the refusal to let a temple be built;

¹ This seems the correct reading (2 Sam. vii. 7).

but it was added, that God would establish the king's dynasty, or, as Jehovah said, "make thee a house." Moreover, though he was not to raise a temple, one should be built by his son, who should succeed him on the throne, which would be established for ever. To this son, God would be a father, and He would treat him as a son, chastening him if he did evil, but never removing His mercy from him as it had been taken from Saul.

It is probable that the state of public feeling was, as yet, opposed to the building of a temple; for the tribes were by no means firmly united, and the jealousy between the North and South—that is, between the house of Joseph, represented by Ephraim, the virtual head of ten of the twelve clans of the nation, and Judah,—to which David belonged, and which stood practically alone,—only slumbered. During the times of the Judges, Judah appears to have kept apart from the rest of the nation. Its capital was at Hebron, and David had been its local king. Moreover, a temple would centralise the national glory at Jerusalem,—a heathen town till lately,—and would take away its importance from Shechem, the capital of the northern tribes. A generation later would have less dislike of the project.

David's prayer of acquiescence in the will of Jehovah is very beautiful. "Sitting" before Jehovah, we are told, he glorified Him for having raised one so lowly to such honour, but, still more, for the great promise, made as a man would make it with his fellow, that his dynasty would be permanent. Such wondrous grace had never been shown to any nation, as that of Jehovah to Israel, from the days of Egypt. He besought Him to establish for ever, the word He had promised, respecting the throne,

and to do as He had said, magnifying His name as Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, and maintaining the line of the king's family. So great an honour did this seem, that he repeats it several times before his prayer closes. To be allowed to found a house, that is, a dynasty, was a glory for which he could not express his gratitude. The blessing of Jehovah upon it was his supreme desire.

How faithfully this promise was kept, is shown by the history of the nation. The ten tribes who revolted had a downward career of revolution, till they were finally carried off to Assyria in B.C. 721. The line of David, on the other hand, reigned till the downfall of Judah in B.C. 588. Still more, the line of David has blossomed for all ages in his great descendant, our Lord and Saviour, in whom his glory will have no end for ever.

DAVID AND URIAH.

THE sin which brought David so low marked the second year of the siege of Rabbah, when the king was at least fifty years old. Joab, the commander of his army, had returned with it to Ammon, "at the time when kings go forth to battle;" but David remained in Jerusalem. The quarter assigned, in that city, to the Gibborim, or "braves," who had followed the king through his rough earlier life, and now formed his "guards," was on the slope of Mount Zion, immediately below the humble palace of their master. Among them, one of the most famous was Uriah, a Hittite by race; that is, one of the "children of Heth," with whom we meet so far back as the days of Abraham, as living in Southern Palestine,—a small offshoot from the great Hittite stock which, for ages, ruled from the Euphrates to Asia Minor, and had been too powerful even for Rameses II. to subdue. He had won a place, by his deeds in war, among the thirty-seven decorated heroes of his famous corps, and, as such, ranked high in local society and general fame. Though an alien, he had adopted the Hebrew religion, and had married the grand-daughter of a local magnate, Ahithophel, the special counsellor of the king.

Having marched with Joab to the front, Uriah left his wife in Jerusalem. She was a woman of striking beauty,

and might have been worthy of him, but for circumstances too exciting for her ambitious and shallow nature to resist. The roofs of houses in the East are flat, and form a pleasant lounging-place by day, as well as a cool sleeping-place by night, in the hot months. That of Bathsheba's house, immediately under the palace, was chosen by her, of all places, for taking her bath, which a modest woman would, one would think, have taken in the privacy of some room below; for, of course, she knew that other roofs, and notably that of the palace, overlooked her own. That David's did so, was most unfortunate for him; for, in an evil hour, he came out to enjoy the cool of the upper air on it, while Bathsheba was thus disporting herself, and the sight of her charms, in a moment raised in him a wild and lawless desire to make her his own. He had a number of wives and concubines already, but the one ewe lamb of Uriah had attracted him; and, with coarse and hideous selfishness, he sent orders to her to come to the palace; Eastern kings, then, as now, treating their subjects like slaves. Nor was she, perhaps, if we may judge from her after life, very unwilling to obey.

But now, in an hour, David had thrown away the good name of a lifetime, and had outraged all his lofty professions, which had been sincere as they were noble. He could not plead youth, nor was the partner of his guilt a woman of humble rank, but the wife of a high officer, who had served him splendidly. There was not only the shame of public exposure, but the risk that Uriah might kill him, in revenge for such a treacherous crime. To hide his sin, he fancied he must go still farther in wickedness. Sending Bathsheba home again, he summoned Uriah

from the camp, on some pretext, hoping that he would go to his own house while in Jerusalem. But the noble soldier, though urged by the king, with hateful deceit, thus to refresh himself, refused to do so, declining any indulgence, as he nobly said, while his companions in arms were lying in the open air round Rabbah, at the war.

Failing in his smooth hypocrisy, David did not shrink from still baser guilt; for sin, once getting our master, drives us to ever greater wrong-doing. He would get rid of Uriah altogether, and make him the bearer of his own death-warrant. Writing a letter to Joab, to put the unsuspecting hero in the front of the battle, he ordered that he should be left without support, his men being withdrawn, that his known bravery might expose him to certain slaughter, in his efforts to rally them, and maintain his own honour, by not retreating. The plan was only too successful. Not knowing the reason of such a command, Joab, with passive heartlessness, carried it out to the letter. Left alone at the strongest part of the defences, the injured man was presently struck down from the walls, and killed.

Such a sin, though common enough in Eastern monarchies, and carefully hushed up as a palace secret, could not be kept private among a people whose conscience—thanks, in great part, to David himself—was, for the times, nobly sensitive. It became the talk of the bazaars, and passed from lip to lip, till, at last, it found an echo in David's own presence. Nathan the prophet, though still a young man, was the royal confessor, if one may so speak, and, as such, sought the presence of the guilty man. His sacred character made his life safe; for a prophet of old,

like a dervish to-day, could brave the wrath of kings, knowing that they dared not lay hands on one believed to speak for God. Reciting the parable of the one ewe lamb, which a greedy rich man took from a poor one, to add to his own ample flock, he forced from David's lips, by his skilful art, an unreserved admission of his own guilt. To Nathan's bold accusation, "Thou art the man," he could put forward no defence. The dreadful punishment to follow his crime, was then told him in agonising detail, and he was left to the pangs of conscience.

Long months had passed since the first sin, and a child had been borne to David by Bathsheba. Its death was to be the first of a long series of visitations to humble him and drive him to penitent remorse. Nor was the penalty fruitless. Love of his children was a striking feature in David's nature; but prayer and fasting were alike vain to save the infant. Its death was his own restoration to a better life. True penitence is seen in a changed life; and this was noticeable in his case. How true and earnest his sorrow was at his fall, is seen in such psalms as the thirty-second and the fifty-first. For three thousand years they have been the chosen language of broken-hearted contrition. One sees in them how he must have striven with lowly grief and shame, long continued and lastingly fruitful, to win back the peace of mind he had lost; to begin once more the godly life, so sadly interrupted; to put away every thought of excuse or palliation; and to cast himself unreservedly on the free mercy of God, which, he fondly trusted, would, in the end, pardon even such a great offender. Nor can we doubt that such humiliation found favour with the All-pitiful;

for with him it is not the greatness of our guilt, but the sincerity of our repentance, that is the condition of peace. Even the best of us has sins enough to deplore; and God has promised to receive even the chief of sinners who seeks His face with a broken and contrite heart.

THE CURSE COMES HOME.

THE results of David's great sin in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba were sad in the extreme. The curse was not confined to his own self-reproaches. The tone of his household was fatally lowered. He had done wrong in having a multitude of wives, for the children had, necessarily, opposing interests; each mother desiring that her own might be the special favourites of the king, and supply a successor to his throne. The different mothers had, each, her own establishment, and thus intrigues of all kinds found as many centres as there were rival families.

The fell example of David himself, in his relations with Bathsheba, found imitation, only too soon, in his household. His eldest son Amnon, the heir-presumptive by birth, committed a shameful outrage on his half-sister, Tamar, the full sister of David's third son, Absalom, a young man of singular personal beauty, but vain, heartless, crafty, ambitious, unprincipled, and yet not without abilities enabling him to play successfully the part to which he aspired. Revenge was determined upon by him for the foul wrong done to his sister, but, it may well be, that, with this, there mingled the desire to get a rival for the throne out of his way. Concealing his purpose for two whole years, till the wretched Amnon fancied himself forgiven, he at last invited all David's sons, Amnon among them, to a

great sheep-shearing feast on his pastures,—the equivalent to our harvest-home,—and caused him to be stabbed as he sat at the banquet. Terrified lest the same fate might befall them, each of the others at once fled on his mule to Jerusalem, where, for a short time, it was fancied that a sweeping revolution had broken out. The alarm soon passed away, though Absalom had to flee to his mother's original home, at Geshur, beyond the Jordan. After three years, however, by the secret aid of Joab, who used a woman of Tekoah as his instrument, the murderer was allowed to return to his country house, though forbidden to enter Jerusalem. Two years passed in this half-exile, but, in the end, the weakness of David for his children, and the influence of Absalom over Joab, the head of the army, secured a free pardon, and the prince once more took his place in the capital.

It was now at least five years since the murder of Amnon and about ten since the crime against Uriah and the scandal with Bathsheba, but the penalty of the king's sin was yet only very partially suffered. A pretended reconciliation with his father, left Absalom free to nurse and carry out dark designs against him; the banishment he had endured for what he probably thought his just punishment of Amnon, rankling in his bosom, and his guilty haste to be great, urging him to any steps, however infamous, likely to bring him sooner to the throne.

Unfortunately, a political blunder of David aided his enemies. Anxious, perhaps, to raise extra taxes, demanded by the growing cost of the monarchy, he resolved, in an evil hour, to make a census of the population throughout the whole country. Orientals have a fixed hatred of being thus registered; knowing, doubtless, that it means

additional oppression ; and Joab, feeling that this was the mood of the people at large, tried hard to dissuade the king from his purpose. Officers were, however, sent out in all directions, and were busy, for nearly a year, in tabulating all details of the possessions of each householder, and the number liable to taxation or conscription. Nothing could have assisted the plot of Absalom more completely, especially as an outbreak of plague, during the census, appeared a direct judgment of Heaven against it as a sin.

David had made himself intensely unpopular, and his base son took advantage of his being so, to try to ruin him. To win the populace, he affected royal state, riding in a chariot preceded by running footmen, such as one still sees in Egypt, and, with this grandeur, he united a calculated humility, as if no less proud of being familiar with the multitude. David had been in the habit of sitting in the shadow of one of the city gates, where the crowd could gather on the open space in front, and there judging all causes brought before him. Every one now heard from Absalom, that his case was clear beyond doubt, and that, though there were delays in justice under the king, his father, who was now getting old, it would be very different if he, Absalom, were king.

Four years passed in this preparation for revolution, and, at last, things seemed to promise success. The brain of the conspiracy was Ahithophel, the grandfather of Bathsheba, a man of surpassing acuteness, and, with him, was associated his son Eliab, one of the Old Guard of David, who was thus a traitor, in the innermost circle of the king's retinue. Absalom's commanding presence,—for he looked every inch a king,—his artful condescensions

to the crowd, and his no less artful pomp and glitter, had honeycombed the foundations of the throne, already weakened by the old monarch's mistakes and sin. It was resolved to make Hebron, the old capital of Judah, the starting-place of the revolution. Its distance from Jerusalem secured a safe beginning of the great enterprise. Feigning a desire to pay a vow in the long famous city, Absalom set off to it, attended by a great cavalcade of the principal men of Jerusalem, who were innocent of any treasonable intention, and had been deceived into the journey. Messengers had already been sent through the land, to proclaim Absalom king, at the signal of trumpet-blasts, which were to be repeated from point to point, as soon as the revolution had broken out at Hebron. A great feast then drew the multitude together, and, in the excitement, the conspirators hailed the traitor as king, in the room of his father. A few hours later, the proclamation had been repeated over the whole country, and everywhere met a response, except in Jerusalem.

Word was speedily brought to the Capital of the outbreak of the rebellion, and of its wide success. It had, in fact, swept over the land, like fire over the dry grass of the prairies. That Absalom, his specially loved son, should have risen against him, filled David with the deepest sorrow; but he kept his presence of mind, and took measures for his safety and eventual victory, worthy of his best years. Feeling that it would be impossible to hold Jerusalem against an attack from all Israel, he instantly resolved to leave it, and set forth, bareheaded and barefooted, as a sign of mourning, amidst a melancholy train, to reach the Jordan before it was too late. His Old Guard happily stood by him, and took their wives and

children with them. The sad procession wound on over the shoulder of Mount Olivet, the ark in its midst, attended by the two High Priests and the whole body of Levites. Hushai, a trusted friend, anxious to follow the king, was sent back, to serve him by spoiling the designs of Absalom, while pretending to advance them, and was successful in gaining the confidence of the prince, who had hurried to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, amidst wailing from his friends, and the curses of some of his enemies, still true to the fallen house of Saul, David kept on, down the steep defile leading to the Jordan. Absalom had already entered the capital, taken possession of the royal harem, as a sign of having seized the throne, and held a council as to future action. Ahithophel pronounced for instant pursuit, but Hushai was able to save David, by recommending delay, while an army was being collected. Runners were sent to tell the king of his danger, and before morning he was safe beyond the Jordan. Absalom's ruin was virtually secured. Ahithophel, seeing himself put aside, committed suicide, and thus the revolution lost its inspiring genius.

Three months passed before further steps were taken on either side. A great army had, in this time, been gathered both by Absalom and his father, and that of the traitor finally crossed the Jordan, to assail the king in his temporary capital at Mahanaim. Joab led the royal army, the host refusing to allow David to peril his life by doing so. One condition only was exacted by him,—that Absalom's life should be safe; but this, fortunately for Israel, was not kept. A great battle resulted in the triumph of the king. Absalom, fleeing on his royal mule, was caught by the branch of a tree running through his

glorious hair, and was killed by Joab, and his army hopelessly scattered. A deep hole in the rough ground supplied a fitting grave for the worthless prince, and his body, rudely thrown into it, was buried beneath a pile of stones, of which every passer-by threw one, to raise a cairn over him, marking the detestation of his crime. Even to this day, indeed, Jewish fathers lead their sons to the so-called tomb of Absalom, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, and make them throw a stone at it, and spit towards it, as an expression of abhorrence at the conduct of the worthless son to his father.

DAVID'S GRIEF FOR ABSALOM.

THE character of any man is a strange bundle of contradictions. Philip the Second, who coolly ordered Alva to put to death the whole population of the Low Countries, because they were Protestants, and strangled his eldest son, apparently on suspicion that he was a doubtful Romanist, was tenderness itself to his daughters, and found delight in writing them, when they were away from him, the sweetest letters about his flowers and garden, as if they were his most cherished delight. The same David who was so ruthless towards his conquered enemies, killing one in three of his prisoners at Moab, and treating the Ammonites even more cruelly; who was, moreover, capable of such a crime as the murder of Uriah, with all its hideous surroundings, was so devoted to his children, that the death of the infant of Bathsheba quite unmanned him for the time, while the brutal offence of Amnon remained unpunished, because he could not be stern against his son; and even the surpassing treason of Absalom would have remained a peril to the state, had the matter been left to his father's decision. The same heart shows, at different times, the greatest harshness, and the tenderest gentleness. To judge any one without looking at his life from every side, is to misrepresent him.

When the arch-traitor had been thrown into the hole in the woods, near the battle-field from which he had fled,

and had been buried beneath the contemptuous stone-heap, thrown on his dishonoured remains, the difficulty of breaking such a result of the victory to David was keenly felt, though he owed his only hope of a quiet close to his reign, to the stern justice thus meted out to his worthless son. But then he had been so handsome, he spoke so fairly, he had been such a joy in the old days at Hebron, as a child, and David, like Eli, was so blind to the worst faults in his sons, that it was almost perilous to let him know, that his command to spare the rebel's life had been disregarded.

To bear evil tidings to an Eastern king is, in any case dangerous, and, hence, when a young priest, Ahimaaz, begged to be allowed to run to Mahanaim, and tell David of Absalom's death, Joab, from a friendly feeling, ordered an Ethiopian, who was present, to go instead. But the younger man, having received permission after his swarthy rival had started, soon outran him, being famous, it would seem, for a special style of running, which bore him with unusual swiftness on his course. The king, in his anxiety as to the issue of the battle and the fate of his son, had come to the narrow interval between the outer and inner gates of the town, and sat there with a heavy heart, to hear the earliest news. Warders mounted the roof of the outer gate, on a line with the wall, from time to time,—the gate standing no doubt, as usual, in a strong building, with a roof intended for defence,—to watch for the approach of any runners from the army; and at last Ahimaaz was descried, followed soon after by the Ethiopian.

"News at last!" cried the poor king. "Who is it?"
"The running is like that of Ahimaaz." "He is a good

man," muttered David, "and comes with good tidings; for he is not one who would have fled from the field, and must have been sent by Joab." But the priest had not the courage to tell the worst; perhaps he had too fine feelings to do so. "All is well," cried he, as he threw himself to the earth on his face before the king, in Oriental obeisance, and then he added, in the style of the East, "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." This vagueness, however, was not enough. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" gasped out the king. But he could get no direct answer from the priest, but only the evasive words, "When Joab sent . . . thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." "Turn aside," said the king, "and stand here." The Ethiopian was then called, and showed no such timidity or sensitiveness. "Tidings, my lord the king," said he, as he came forward: "for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee." "Is the young man Absalom safe?" struck in the king, his heart dwelling, above all, on the safety of his son. "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." It was clear that Absalom had perished. David had been in the space between the two gate-buildings till now, but he could stay there no longer. Bursting into a paroxysm of grief, he climbed up the steps leading to the chamber over the outer gate, and men heard him wailing as he ascended them: "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The news of the king's violent grief for his worthless

son soon spread far and wide, ultimately reaching Joab, the general in command, himself. The effect was disastrous; for instead of joy at the victory that had saved David's throne and life, there was only a wide gloom, as if misfortune had befallen him and his host. Instead of returning with triumphant music and loud acclaim, which their valour and great services richly deserved, the wearied heroes who had ventured their lives in the field, came back by stealth into the town, like people who creep away ashamed when they have fled in cowardice from the battle. Still the wailing rose, loud and bitter, from the chamber where the king had hid himself, with covered face, sobbing with a loud voice, and ever and anon calling out, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

It was natural that a father should grieve over the death of a son, especially of one so noble in person, even though so unworthy in conduct; but he was a king as well as a father, and the dead man had sought his father's death, and had overthrown his government. Such ill-considered sorrow as he now showed might have the worst consequences. Joab, therefore, always faithful to David, however unworthy in other respects, made his way into the presence, and, with soldierly bluntness, told the king that he had shamed the faces of all his servants, who that day had saved his life, and the lives of his sons and daughters, and of his wives and concubines. In so doing, he seemed to love his enemies and hate his friends; for he had virtually declared by his wailing and gloom, that he set no value on either the leaders or the rank and file of his army, but, clearly, would have been well pleased if his whole army, officers and men, had perished in the fight, provided Absalom had escaped. He must, therefore,

at once rise from the earth on which he lay, and go out to the multitude and speak comfortably to them; for it was certain that if he did not thus counteract his mistaken grief, there would not be a man of his force left by night, and that would be worse for him than all that had happened to his hurt, from his youth till then.

The force of Joab's words was so evident that David felt he must act instantly on the counsel given him. Rising, therefore, and putting aside the signs of mourning, he came down to the open space before the gate, to return thanks to the army for their splendid service. It was, fortunately, not yet too late. Word spread fast that the king had made his appearance and sat in the place of judgment, to receive those who had fought for him so nobly, and ere long the vast multitude gathered before him, to hear his congratulations and warm acknowledgments. It was well that the loyalty of his followers had not been strained too far; for the question of a restoration still hung in the balance. The jealousy between South and North was profound, and only very wise management could secure David's once more reigning over an undivided nation.

CHARACTER OF DAVID.

WE are fortunate enough to have some last words from the death-bed of the hero-king of Israel preserved to us, strange to say, for nearly three thousand years, and giving a faint echo from the chamber in which he lay breathing away his sinking life.

These words are more like those of a prophet than of the "sweet singer" of so many psalms and hymns; but the near approach of death seems to have raised him to a higher strain, as if a special inspiration had come upon him as he reviewed the wonderful experiences of the life so nearly closed, and looked forward with eyes illuminated as with the light of eternity, on the future. It will be noticed that this parting song consists, in effect, of three turns of thought. The first, that if the ruler of Israel who shall follow him be one who exercises his power uprightly, in the fear of God, prosperity will attend him in all things, since a new reign is like a new day; and, if it be a righteous one, will be like a bright, cloudless morning, whose beams will bring forth all fruitfulness, as from a land prepared by rich, heavy showers for their life-giving influence. In the second part of the song, if I may so call it, David tells his own experience of this. He had sought and found the covenant of friendship with God; and as he had always walked before his people consistently with this aim, so, prophets, and the nation as a whole,

recognised and witnessed that he did really enjoy this favoured relation to Jehovah, and that its fruits, in Divine blessing and the fulfilment of all national wishes, had already begun to spring for both the king and the people at large, and, could not but continue, surviving his death, and abiding permanently on the land.

This the dying man impresses on the conscience of all by a contrast, in the third part of his farewell, between the position of a righteous king and one who is the opposite. Those who do not live in such friendship with God, says he, but in rebellion against Him, have no rich blessing from above, coming, as it were, to meet them, but are, rather, like worthless and hurtful thorny growth, from which one draws back the hand, and against which he comes provided with hooks and bills, if he has to pass through the place they have invaded, if, indeed, he do not destroy them root and branch by fire. David himself had thus destroyed many confederacies of his enemies, and so would all ungodly nations perish before the faithful servants of the Most High.

The deep religiousness of David's nature, notwithstanding his grievous fall, cannot be doubted, when we read the psalm in which he embodies his ideal of the true ruler of a people. In Psalm ci., for example, he writes as no one could who was not intent on acting up to a lofty conception of his duty.

“I will sing of mercy and judgment:

I will say to Thee, O Jehovah!

I will give heed to the perfect way:

Oh, when wilt Thou come unto me?

I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

I will set no wicked thing before my eyes :

I hate the work of them that turn aside,

It shall not cleave to me.

The (man of) froward heart shall depart from me ;

I shall not know what is wicked.

He who secretly slanders his neighbour, him will I cut off :

He who has haughty looks and a proud heart will not I suffer.

Mine eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me :

He that walks in a perfect way—*he* shall serve me.

He that worketh deceit shall not dwell in my house :

He who speaks lies shall not tarry in my sight.

Diligently shall I cut off all the wicked of the land,

That I may (thus) root out all evil-doers from the city of Jehovah."

His ideal of a citizen of Jerusalem, "the city of Jehovah," is no less strikingly shown in other psalms. Thus he says in Psalm xv. :

"Jehovah ! who shall abide in Thy tabernacle (or tent) ?

Who shall dwell on Thy holy hill ?

He who walks uprightly, who worketh righteousness,

Who speaks the truth in his heart,

Who does not backbite with his tongue,

Nor doeth evil to his neighbour,

Nor raises slander against his neighbour ;

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned,

But he honoureth them that fear Jehovah ;

He who, having sworn to his own hurt, does not change ;

Who does not put out his money to usury,

Or take a bribe against the innocent.

He who acts thus shall never be moved."

So also, in Psalm xxiv., he asks :

“Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah?
 Who shall stand in His holy place?
 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart,
 Who hath not set his heart upon vanity,
 And has not sworn deceitfully.”

One who could look back from his death-bed on a reign of which such psalms represent the spirit and aim, might assuredly claim to have made a covenant with Jehovah, and might confidently believe that, if his successors followed in his course, the blessing of the Eternal would make his house perpetual.

Unfortunately, the high ideal of the Psalmist-king was very far from being closely imitated by too many of the rulers who sprang from him. Yet it is a striking fact, that while revolutions continually overthrew the dynasties of the ten tribes, the family of David sat on the throne of Judah till the city at last fell before Nebuchadnezzar, more than four hundred years after David's death.

NOTE.—Psalm ci. is ascribed to David by Delitzsch and to “a king” by Moll. Graetz assigns it to Hezekiah. Cheyne to the time of the Maccabees! Psalm xv. is ascribed by Delitzsch to David and Moll: to Josiah's day by Ewald.

Psalm xxiv. is assigned by Delitzsch to David: by Hitzig to Jeremiah, while Ewald and Olshausen think it is made up of two psalms.

With all respect to Canon Cheyne, as a representative of the most advanced criticism, I cannot help thinking his conclusions very often based on quite illusory grounds.

SOLOMON'S WISE CHOICE.

THE name "Solomon" is one which, though consecrated to a special meaning in the case of the son of David and Bathsheba, was already well known, before his birth, in the west of Asia. An Assyrian god bears it, and was specially honoured on the Euphrates as "the god of peace." In the time of Tiglath-pileser III., moreover, a "Solomon" was King of Moab, so that the Assyrian deity was known there, and had his name given to a prince; and there was also an Assyrian king who bore it long before David's time.¹ After long and bloody wars, the old king must have yearned for peace, if only to strengthen the empire of which he had laid the foundations. Perhaps also he may have wished, in the name of his son, to embody a trust that the sin with Bathsheba, his mother, was finally forgiven.

Solomon was between twenty and thirty years old when his father died, and succeeded to the throne apparently in

¹ NOTE.—The name "Solomon," in our English Bible, renders literally the name of the son of David, as given in the Greek New Testament and in the writings of Josephus. The Septuagint gives the name as *Salomon*, while the Hebrew text of the Old Testament offers *Shēlomō*. In so far as the ending *ō* in this Hebrew name stands for *ōn*, obscured from the original *ān* (compare, also, Hos. x. 14), the Hebrew *Shēlomō* is the same as the name of the Assyrian god *Shalmān*, occasionally met with in Assyrian proper names (for example, *Shalmān-ushshir*), or as the Moabitic *Shalamanu* (II. R. 67, l. 60). There may be added to the illustrations in the text, the fact that the name of "Solomon" has also been found in a Palmyrene inscription (compare de Vogüé, *Syrie Centrale*, I., p. 55, No. 76). Tiglath-pileser III. is identical with the biblical king of the same name (2 Kings xv. 29, &c.).

fulfilment of a promise made to Bathsheba after the death of Absalom, the heir-apparent, or, perhaps, even before it. Adonijah, his half-brother, an older son of David, still lived, and had already plotted to gain the crown before his father's death; but his attempt had been foiled, and Solomon had been formally anointed and seated on the throne as heir at that time. There was, hence, no opposition to his accession. The wife of Uriah had succeeded in displacing the sons of all her rivals, and she had attained the supreme dignity of mother of the king.

The training of Solomon must have been a mingling of very different influences. The prophet Nathan seems to have been what we might call his guardian or tutor, but it is a difficult task to guide a prince. The better side of David's nature would tell in the lad's favour; but he lived in the air of an Oriental court, with its rival families, its scandals, its extravagance, and its various shadows as well as lights. The result was seen in his riper character. In his earlier reign enthusiastic for Jehovah, and the builder of the Temple at Jerusalem, he ended by building temples and altars on the heights around, to the foul idols of the neighbouring heathen. Gifted with splendid abilities, wise to a proverb, and versed in all the learning of his day, he was finally to show himself so grossly selfish, as to oppress and drain the resources of his people, for his personal glory and enjoyment. Beginning his reign with a prayer for an understanding heart, he developed into a sensualist with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Nor did all his wisdom save him from so reigning, that the empire bequeathed him by David was lost to his son, by an outburst of popular indignation at the wrongs they had suffered at his hand.

An incident recorded of the beginning of Solomon's reign is in keeping with the ideal of kingly glory which he had learned from his father, as is shown by several of the psalms. The fear of Jehovah was still his ruling characteristic, and a just and pure government his highest ambition. There was as yet no temple in Jerusalem; and though David had raised a sacred tent in Jerusalem, and placed the ark within it, the sacredness of many hill-tops, or high-places, was still believed in by many,—especially that of the hill of Gibeon, the place of the old tabernacle,¹ about six miles north of the Holy City. Thither Solomon determined to make a royal progress, that he might offer sacrifices, on a scale becoming his dignity, at the altar before the venerable Tabernacle of the wilderness times, which still stood, worn and venerable, on that sacred height. Setting forth from Jerusalem with the high state so dear to his nature, attended by the chiefs of thousands and of hundreds, the judges, governors, and heads of the fathers, summoned from all parts of the land to add splendour to the ceremony, he moved forward with high pomp on his short journey. Fewer than a thousand burnt-offerings were held insufficient; but he may not have waited till the tedious rites were ended, many days being required for their completion. Amidst the clash of cymbals and the strains of song and harp, he at least inaugurated the grand service, he and the people kneeling before God as the smoke of the victims rose from the altar.

At last evening fell, and the king, excited and wearied, lay down to rest. But as he slept, the thoughts of his waking hours took shape, as they so often do with ourselves, in the wonders of a dream. As he lay unconscious

¹ 2 Chron. i. 3.

in sleep, Jehovah, whom he had sought to honour, appeared to him; we know not in what way, but assuredly not in any human form,—perhaps as a voice recognised as Divine. The sleeper presently heard the words, “Ask what I shall give thee.” The answer of Solomon was admirable: “Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant David, my father, great mercy, according as he walked before Thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with Thee; and Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Jehovah my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king, instead of David my father: and I am but a little child,”—a man in years, indeed, but I feel like a child in my great position, still new to me; “I know not how to go out or come in,”—I do not know how to transact the business of my high office, to which I have daily to go forth from my house, to sit in the gate,—“and Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give, therefore, Thy servant a mind clear in its discernment”—full of insight—“to judge Thy people, that I may discriminate rightly between good and bad,”—for as king I am the supreme judge of all causes; “for who is able”—unassisted from above—“to judge this, Thy so great a people?”

Here the dream seemed to the dreamer to end, and he lay waiting, in his imagination, for a reply from the vision. Presently it came, for “the speech pleased Jehovah, that Solomon had asked this thing.” “Because,” said the voice, “thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life: neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked

for thyself insight to understand how to judge rightly," —when thou sittest to decide as king; "behold, I have done according to thy word: lo, I have given thee a wise and a discerning mind; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days."

At this moment, we are told, Solomon awoke; "and, behold, it was a dream." To have had such a dream, however, shows on what his mind ran in those early days. Well would it have been for him, if his later years had fulfilled the golden promise of this fair beginning!

THE TEMPLE.

THE Tabernacle of the wilderness had apparently been set up, first, after the tribes had crossed the Jordan at Gilgal, on the slope between that stream and the hills of the western side. How long it stood in the circle of huge stones, which the word "Gilgal" seems to indicate, is not told; but after the conquest of Central Palestine it was transferred to Shiloh, where a levelled space on the low hill, with rough walls stretching hither and thither, seems to mark the site where it rose on stone supports, half temple and half tent. In Samuel's day, however, the fierce inroads of the Philistines from the rich plain on the sea-coast, seem to have culminated in the burning of Shiloh and its consequent destruction as the sanctuary of the nation. Already in the days of Jeremiah, six hundred years before Christ, it had long lain waste;¹ and so completely did it, in the end, pass out of notice, that its very locality was unknown till discovered by Dr. Edward Robinson, of New York, under the name of Seilun. There is now a wretched hamlet of mud and stone huts on the slope, and a wilderness of ruined walls over the crest of the low hill, but no other relic of its ancient population, except a number of rock tombs in a short side valley leading to the spring of the neighbourhood. Yet few spots might be more fertile, if there were men to till it.

¹ Jer. vii. 12, 14.

The venerable Tabernacle was, fortunately, saved from the wreck of Shiloh, having, no doubt, been removed before the sacking and burning of the place. It next appears at Nob, then on the hill of Gibeon, a few miles north of Jerusalem; and thither, as we have seen, Solomon went, with the state so dear to him, to offer sacrifice on the old brazen altar of Bezaleel, before the worn but sacred tent. Hitherto there had been no other national sanctuary, until David raised a new holy tent in Jerusalem, popular opinion preventing his building a temple like those of the heathen communities round. There had been, however, from the earliest times, a custom of offering sacrifices, or, at least, of worshipping, on a great many of the rounded hill tops, over all the land,—spots selected in those simple ages as nearer the heavens, and thus nearer the Divine Being. To this day, indeed, this immemorial usage prevails in Palestine, the very name given to the low-domed building which crowns some height in almost every landscape, being virtually the same as that used for similar structures even before the Hebrew invasion. To-day, such a spot is called a *mukam*. A similar one, without a building, is called a *makōm* by Jacob. From their position on hill-tops these primitive sanctuaries were naturally called “high places,” but it did not suit the policy of Solomon to leave them their old importance. To centralise national worship at Jerusalem would make his capital illustrious, would bring wealth to it, would add to his own glory, and would give him the control of the priesthood. In Providence it served higher ends; but his ideas, we may be sure, were more worldly than spiritual.

Having resolved, therefore, to build a permanent temple, the king raised vast levies of workmen from the tribes, by

the odious system of forced labour. A treaty with Hiram of Tyre secured him a supply of cedar from Lebanon, which was cut by great gangs of Hebrews sent thither, then dragged to the coast, tied into rafts, floated to Joppa, and finally, at huge expense of toil and misery, dragged up the hills to Jerusalem, twenty-five hundred feet above the sea. Quarries were opened under the wall of the city on the north side, the stone there being admirably adapted for the new sanctuary. Years of labour hollowed out vast recesses beneath the city,—so vast that it seemed to me, as I groped my way through them by the light of a candle, as if the whole town were honeycombed. There, in darkness, except for their lamps, the poor slaves cut out the vast stones needed for the Temple; others, in due time, dragging them on sledges, to designated points. Tyrian builders and architects supplied the skill and knowledge wanting to the Hebrews, and at last the Temple stood complete,—a building very small in comparison with a modern cathedral; for it was only about ninety feet long, thirty feet broad, and forty-five feet high, though it stood in a wide space of nearly thirty-five acres, in shape like the page of an ordinary book, if one trimmed the edges rather badly, so as to spoil their straight line.

The dedication was a wonderful scene. Thousands of oxen and sheep burned on the altar. The great ones of Israel, with the king at their head, and the full body of the priests and Levites, lent splendour to the occasion, while the myriads of worshippers gave it deep solemnity. It is worthy of notice that Solomon seems to have acted as priest as well as king, superseding the High Priest himself, both in sacrificing and in giving

the benediction to the people. The acceptance by God of the sanctuary thus consecrated to Him, is one of the most striking incidents recorded in the Old Testament. Curiously enough, there is a Sikh temple in the Punjaub in which one sees a great brass plate, dating about twenty years back, on which, with the attestation of high dignitaries, it is recorded that when, at that time, the affairs of the nation were very low, and special prayer had been made in the temple, the splendour of God suddenly filled the house with unbearable brightness. Very strange, is it not? But then God accepts in every nation those who truly seek Him.

The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple is an exquisite composition,—lowly, yet lofty; high in its conception of human duty and of Divine mercy; perfect in expression. That such a man should have been marked by other traits, recorded of him, is a strange proof of the mingling of evil with good in the best of us.

THE FAME OF SOLOMON.

THE immense fame of Solomon in his day is strikingly shown by the deep impression that it left on his own and subsequent ages. In the time of Christ, "the glory of Solomon" was the ideal of royal magnificence; and to the present day, his name survives, with those of Nimrod and Alexander the Great, as a legendary wonder from the remote past, among all the tribes of Western Asia.

In his own age, the glory of the Jewish sultan had already become the subject of widespread rumour, even distant countries catching the story of his wisdom and munificence, from the travelling merchant or the crew of some far-sailed Tarshish ship. Among other remote regions to which his fame penetrated, was Sabæa, or Sheba, a district of Arabia Felix, famous in those early ages for its incense, balm, and myrrh, from the trade in which it was said to be one of the richest countries of antiquity. It lay along the east shore of the Red Sea, just north of what is now the British military post of Aden; so that a journey to Jerusalem by land was a great undertaking, the Holy City being separated from it by the whole length of the Red Sea, and the further distance from the peninsula of Sinai.

The monarch of this glowing realm, one of the very hottest places in the world, was a queen, whose name is not recorded. In her scorched and stony, though still,

it would seem, wealthy country, she had become so excited by the stories brought her—probably from the report of sailors in the ships sent to Punt on the Somali coast, outside Bab-el-Mandeb, by Solomon—that she could not rest, till she had made a pilgrimage, to see for herself what was the world's talk, as well as make acquaintance with the wonderful sultan with whom it was associated.

Summoning, therefore, a very great train of officials and attendants of all ranks, and for all offices, honourable or menial, and collecting a great body of camels, which alone could undertake such a journey, in such a land, she set out on her progress. Any one who has visited the Red Sea can imagine the difficulty of what must have seemed to ordinary minds such a wild adventure. Not only would camels be needed for riding, for the queen and her suite, including who knows how many of her own sex as attendants; a vast number would be required for the water, food, tent equipage, and household utensils; not to speak of those set apart to bear the gifts to be presented to Solomon, which must have themselves made a herd; for it is Oriental etiquette to make as lavish a display as possible in connection with the presentation of gifts to any royal personage. She had from eighteen hundred to two thousand miles to travel with all this extraordinary surrounding,—a distance requiring, probably, not less than four or five months' continuous advance, cumbered as the speed must have been by the nature of the country, and the multiplied difficulties attending the movement of such a strange host. The cost to the swarthy queen must have been quite beyond ordinary computation.

At last, however, she had crossed the dry limestone uplands of the south of Palestine, and drew near the city for which she was making,—a very poor and small place, no doubt, compared with our modern towns. The excitement at her approach must have been immense. In our day, a visit of a great potentate, from some region beyond the bounds of the commonly known lands, is impossible; for all the earth is, as it were, near us, in these times; but it was not so a thousand years before Christ, when the Jew knew only a very small part of the earth indeed. Solomon would be in all his glory, we may be quite certain, when she finally made her entrance to his petty capital. He would not let himself be outdone in magnificence, whoever had to pay for the display. But though it might be a grand time for him, the thousands of slaves who had to prepare for the tremendous round of ceremonials, would have a very different opinion of it. What he gave his guest we do not know; likely very little, if we may judge from his conduct to Hiram; but he got a great deal,—a hundred and twenty talents of gold, worth, perhaps, over a million pounds sterling, besides a great store of spices, and lavish gifts of precious stones. The buildings Solomon had raised filled her with wonder, and the lavishness of his establishment, in all its details, was still more astonishing; but his wisdom was the most overpowering of all her experiences. How it was shown, we do not know; but legend tells us, in Oriental fashion, that it displayed itself in the solving of riddles and answering of hard questions. Thus, he told which were boys and which girls, in a crowd of five hundred of each sex; the whole thousand dressed alike. He drilled a hole through a pearl, at once,

without breaking it; he threaded a diamond cut through in zigzags, using a worm to draw a thread after it; and he filled a crystal goblet with water neither from heaven nor earth, by driving a wild horse furiously and gathering its sweat. The Bible account is much more dignified. "She communed with him of all that was in her heart," and received answers to all her questions.

A memorial of the visit of the Queen of Sheba was believed to remain in the balsam groves of Jericho, famous even in the days of Christ. The Abyssinians, moreover, resting on her title of "Queen of the South," claim her as the ancestress, through Solomon, of their kings; but this is, of course, only foolish ignorance. That the incident of the visit should be set forth at such length in Scripture shows the extreme antiquity of the narrative; for it could not have seemed so wonderful in a later age. But to the Hebrews it was one of the greatest honours that could have been paid their sovereign, and so deep was the impression it made, that we find Isaiah, centuries later, speaking of Sheba as bringing gold and incense¹ to the Messianic successor of the Son of David.

¹ Isa. lx. 6.

SOLOMON'S SHORTCOMINGS.

THE comparatively few years from the union of the tribes of Israel under David, to their permanent separation under Rehoboam, form the brief moment of Jewish glory as a state. That Judah, which had no high ancestral claims, like Ephraim and Manasseh, the heirs of the great name of Joseph, should be allowed supremacy even for a time, was due only to the surpassing abilities of David as a warrior and administrator, and to the exigencies of the nation after the virtual extinction of the house of Saul. There had always, in fact, been a deep-seated rivalry between Judah, which chose to stand alone, with its centre at Hebron—the tribe of Simeon, scattered over the south country, being gradually merged in it,—and the rest of the tribes, who accepted the headship of Ephraim. The only parallel that occurs to me, is the inter-relations of the various Irish or Scotch Celtic septs, each tenacious of its tribal rights, but many willing to rally, on occasion, to the banner of a particular clan, to which they paid a shadowy homage as their titular head. Thus, the fact that the clan Campbell, in Scotland, stood aloof from Prince Charles Edward in 1745, hoping to profit by its loyalty to the house of Brunswick, and thus gain the headship of the clans as a whole, was much more the secret of the wide gathering round the rival flag of the “Lost Cause,” than any devotion to the

Stuarts. Such a jealousy glowed in the bosoms of all the Jewish tribes, at their subjection to the hated and condemned suzerainty of Judah, and made it certain that only the greatest wisdom could maintain the unity of the nation, under kings throned in Jerusalem.

Samuel, the great prophet-reformer, had seen the dark side of the revolution for which the tribes clamoured, when they demanded a king. Free till then, he knew that monarchy would copy the spirit of the courts around, and fetter the nation under despotism, in spite of every precaution. He did not, indeed, foreshadow the impossibility of a lasting union under one crown; but in his picture of the slavery and degradation, sure, in his opinion, to follow the great change from their ancient tribal simplicity, he indicated the causes which led inevitably to the revolt of Jeroboam.

The grinding oppression of Solomon might have ceased under his successors, but the tone of the nation, its social condition, and its real prosperity, had been permanently affected. A splendid court meant the wealth of the few and the poverty of the many. Immense outlay, to maintain crowds of officers and attendants, who, personally, added nothing to the wealth of the community, was a terrible drain on the substance of a people like Israel. Nor was even this the worst. Rank aspired to what was fancied becoming state. The modest field which Saul himself had been content to plough, no longer sufficed. Great men sought to add field to field, and to raise fine mansions, around which should stretch a landscape, once cheerful with the smoke of many happy cottages, but now left lonely, to swell the grandeur of the noble. A proletariat was thus, for the first time, created in Israel.

The little homesteads, held since the days of Joshua, were seized by violence, or cozened from their owners by craft. In the Prophets, we find a constant denunciation of the evil days on which they had fallen,—days when wealth accumulated, and men decayed. But their voices were lifted in vain. To the close of the monarchy, in both the North and South, there was no return to the bright days, when every house-father lived on his own ground, and when all had enough for their simple wants. How often must the Hebrew, as he saw some local magnate borne past by prancing horses, in his chariot, have thought of the time when Saul went out with a single slave, or servant, to seek his father's asses! How often, when they heard of the splendours of Jerusalem, inside its palaces, with their gardens and fountains, their vessels of gold and silver, the thousand wives and concubines of Solomon, or the less offensive harems of his successors; or when the great king flashed past, on his progresses to the coolness of Lebanon, when the hot sun made the South unpleasant,—must they have thought of the times when Gideon, the great deliverer of the nation, was not above threshing his own wheat, or when David was a shepherd on the uplands near Bethlehem! Jewish monarchy was fatal to the nation, as a whole, in its most vital interests.

Nor was its result more happy in its influence on the national religion. In those early days, men were still very simple in their ideas. David grieved to be in Moab, twenty or thirty miles from Jerusalem, because it was under another god, Chemosh, instead of his own God, Jehovah. But he was true to his faith. Solomon, with his less religious nature, came, in the end, to treat all

creeds as being much on a level,—partly from intellectual indifferentism, partly from a politic toleration, to keep the favour of those under or around him, and partly from the moral weakness towards his crowds of wives, entailed by unbridled sensuality, and partly, to propitiate the rulers of the surrounding nations, by providing for the worship of their local gods by visitors attracted to Jerusalem for trade. It may, indeed, have been one object of Solomon by such temples, to lure business men from outside, to settle in his capital. Whatever the causes, the evil that he did lived after him. Idol-worship could claim that he introduced it. The high places on the yellow slope, south of that known as the Mount of Olives, were multiplied over the land. Jehovah, as only their tribal God, was too often forgotten, to worship the divinities of the great nations of Western Asia, the gods of Phœnicia, Assyria, Syria, or Babylon; though this last city was, in reality, the Rome of antiquity; the centre of ecclesiastical authority over all Western Asia, and even in Egypt, under the reign of Khu-n-Aten.

Yet all nations are true to the spirit of their origin. The colours laid at the roots of the Southern kingdom by David, showed themselves, more or less abidingly and vividly, till, after temporary lapses, the little nation left to his house, returned, in Babylon, to the worship of David's God, in spite of the idolatry of Solomon and too many of his successors. In the same way, the conservatism which clung to Rehoboam, preserved Judah from the fierce revolutions of the Northern kingdom, which, beginning with revolt, continued to be marked by violent changes of dynasty. The last king of Judah was a descendant of the shepherd-king of Bethlehem; the

last ruler of the Northern kingdom was the close of a series of royal families. And as Jeroboam founded his kingdom in idolatry, so it continued to be more or less idolatrous, to the end, with no such shot colour of Jehovah-worship gleaming through its history, and triumphing in the end, as marks the history of Judah.

SOLOMON'S IDOLATRY.

THE rise of the Jewish empire under David had been possible from the temporary decline of Assyria, which was no longer, in his day, or for some generations after, able to dominate Syria and Palestine as in earlier times. It must have been difficult, however, for a people so different from those around them, in many ways, as the Jews, to maintain the supremacy over wide regions, gained through the wars of David; and hence even the reign of Solomon, though he was specially "the man of peace," seems to have been more or less disturbed, especially toward its close, by attempts of the races subject to him to assert their independence. Edom and Syria forced him to send expeditions against them, or at least to defend himself against their hostility. But he was able to preserve his kingdom in outward unity till his death, though elements of disruption, which were then to become only too powerful, were already a source of anxiety in his later years.

The secret of this state of things is to be sought partly in the policy of "the wise king" in his relations to the heathenism of the nations around. One would have thought that a man honoured by a Divine vision, and cautioned by it, that, if he turned away and forsook God's statutes and His commandments, which God had set before him, and should go and serve other gods and worship them, God would pluck up his house and his people from

the land, by the roots, and cast them out, and make them a proverb and a by-word among all nations,¹ could not possibly transgress in this particular direction. Still more would it seem impossible for one thus to apostatise, who had signalised His reign by building a great temple to Jehovah, and dedicating it to his worship as the one only God, amidst an accumulation of testimonies, from Jehovah Himself, of His Divine majesty, and of His acceptance of the sanctuary thus consecrated to Him. Yet so strangely is our character made up of contradictions, that, as I have said, it was to Solomon the introduction of heathen worship to Jerusalem was due, with all its train of national suffering and humiliation, ending with the overthrow of the State and the captivity in Babylon.

This terrible error and crime was the penalty of a previous offence. Anxious to bind to his throne, in close alliance, the neighbouring races and kingdoms, the builder of the Temple "gave himself to foreign women."² His worse nature, perhaps, prompted his higher, to veil his monstrous sensuality under a cloak of wider state-craft and greater liberality than his times sanctioned, so as to deceive even himself into a palliation of his sin. He may have come to fancy that there was good in all creeds, and that the same God was worshipped in all, under different names,—an opinion too common even in our own day. He may, thus, have lost a due estimate of what was false in the different forms of heathenism, and played the philosopher with himself, by fine spun theories of a hidden meaning supposed to shine out from behind their outward rites, however hateful. Perhaps he looked on Baal,

¹ 2 Chron. vii. 19, 20.

² 1 Kings xi. 1-8.

Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Jehovah, as only different forms of nature-worship, all substantially true; for a subtle mind can reason itself to believe almost anything.

From whatever cause, or variety of causes, it may have been, Solomon permitted a "high place" to be built on "the hill east of Jerusalem," for "Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites," for "Moloch, the abomination of the children of Ammon," and for each of the other gods of "all his foreign wives." When we remember that he had taken princesses from Sidon, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the Hittite tribes, it is clear that the heights around the Holy City must have been crowned with a number of idolatrous sanctuaries, each of which would have its priesthood, its own sacrifices, not infrequently such as nature abhors, and its own clouds of incense, rising up as if in rivalry to that which ascended from the altar of Jehovah, in the Temple. It is, besides, expressly told us, that Solomon, not contented with sanctioning such insults to the God of his race,—the one true God,—himself went after Ashtoreth and Milcom, or Moloch.¹

Wide corruption of the national morality must have resulted from such an example set by the throne. In ever-broadening circles it spread through the community an irreligiousness fatal in the end. Nor was his evil course without the worst effect on the king himself; for, while we find prophets at his side in the beginning of his reign, there is no mention of them in his later years.

¹ 1 Kings xi. 5.

CLOSE OF SOLOMON'S REIGN.

THE reign of Solomon was the spring-tide of Hebrew greatness, but it began to ebb even before the wise king died. A far-reaching empire; a merchant navy bearing the Jewish flag to distant lands of the East; a wide and profitable trade with the countries round; great palaces in Jerusalem, including the Temple; imperial splendour in the court; and much else,—so dazzled the imagination in after centuries, that “the glory of Solomon” became the proverbial expression, in Israel, for supreme magnificence. But the material splendour of this noonday of the race was its least claim to honour; it was, also, a period of great literary activity, for to this time must be referred the development of intellectual culture in various directions. The religious philosophy constantly recurring in the later portions of Scripture, under the name of Wisdom, dates from this age. Religious poems like the Song of Songs; pithy sentences which have ever since been recognised as proverbs; treatises on natural science, either by Solomon or those stimulated to such studies by his example,—were only some of the fruits of increased mental activity in the nation.

But all this light was, unfortunately, attended by an ever-lengthening shadow. No people of antiquity more jealously guarded popular liberty, even under kings, than the Jews; and Solomon was, before long, felt to be

endangering this, by introducing a despotism which, if not checked, would reduce them to the level of the enslaved nations around. The taxation grew ruinously oppressive, especially from the forms in which, partly, it was levied. The cost of the Temple must have been great, but the profits of the king's commercial revenues may have defrayed it largely. Yet the objection of Nathan that God had been pleased to dwell in a "tent" through the past, and did not need a great temple, like the temples of the outside nations, may well have expressed the dissatisfaction of the tribes at the undertaking, as not only an imitation of heathen usages, but as centralising at Jerusalem the worship hitherto paid on all the heights of the land, and thus, at once, robbing local shrines of their glory, and raising Jerusalem to a political centre, with the king supreme, alike over the priesthood and all tribal institutions. Then came the lavish outlay on a series of palaces; the creation of a harem on the vastest scale; the hugeness of the civil list, to maintain numberless court officials and the multitudinous retinues of his queens, concubines, and dignitaries, and the unlimited expenditure to gratify the tastes and whims of the great sultan. The private domains of the crown, though very large, no longer provided sufficient revenue, though increased by the tribute of subject nations, the gifts of great visitors,—such as the Queen of Sheba,—and the profits from foreign commerce and trade licenses. The whole country was divided into twelve sections, each of which had to furnish contributions to the royal table and the other expenses of the court. It seems, indeed, probable that, in the later years of the king, a poll tax was levied universally, though such a tax was especially hateful to Jew and Canaanite alike.

Still worse, a system of forced labour, to carry out the grand conceptions of Solomon, in his palaces, roads, fortifications, gardens, reservoirs, and aqueducts, was established, thus introducing virtual slavery, like that which prevailed in Egypt till lately. Thirty thousand men were forced to fell trees on Lebanon, or toil in the quarries under Jerusalem,—each division, of ten thousand, serving for four months in the year; that is, every third month. Nor was this all. Seventy thousand men were told off as porters and labourers, while eighty thousand more were sent to Lebanon and the stone quarries, to prepare the rough material for final use; this vast army being kept to its task by no fewer than thirty-two hundred overseers.

The suffering thus entailed must have been terrible. To labour, for years, in dark, damp quarries, in rough mountain forests, or in the sore toil of dragging beams or squared stones, doubtless told heavily on the population. No wonder there was dissatisfaction, especially when the haughty Ephraim had thus to serve like a slave, for the glory of Jerusalem and Judah.

But the avenger was at hand. Solomon himself received a Divine intimation that the kingdom would be rent from him for his idolatry, apart from other shortcomings, and Judah, alone, be left to his son. The instrument of this great revolution proved to be one Jeroboam, from Zaretan, in the Jordan district,—a man of bright intelligence, who had been employed by Solomon as superintendent of the task work exacted from the northern tribes, on the fortifications of Jerusalem. To strengthen the new capital was, to such men, intensely hateful, as tending to establish the supremacy of the tribe they

regarded as their rival, and to lower the importance of the rest of the tribes for ever.

Of the death of Solomon we know nothing. Things continued outwardly calm till he passed away, excepting when subject communities strove to regain independence. But the ground-swell of discontent was already heaving under the smooth glitter of his monarchy ; and the folly of his son ere long heightened the storm, till, in one wild surge, the glory of the wise king's empire disappeared for ever.

YEROBOAM'S REVOLT.

THE union of the twelve Hebrew tribes under David had been effected with great difficulty, and only after the virtual extirpation of the house of Saul, and the suppression of the revolt of Absalom, had left David without a rival. He was a hero, indeed, of whom the whole race might be proud ; for he had raised the Hebrew mountain-tribes from obscurity and weakness, to empire and fame, leaving them a dominion extending from the valley of the Orontes to the River of Egypt, and from the Euphrates to the Great Sea. It was natural, therefore, that they should continue united under his son ; and, had Solomon been wise in all respects, a national feeling might have been intensified under his rule, which would have made the union permanent.

His selfish ambition, however, to play the part of an Assyrian sultan, alike in the greatness of his domestic establishment, the splendour of his state, and the magnificence of his undertakings, was too severe a strain even for a reign so prosperous, or a treasury filled with the wealth of a mighty commerce, and the tribute of far-stretching territories. The support of his palaces and their countless inmates not only drained the revenue of extensive crown lands, but necessitated the exaction of heavy requisitions from the whole country.

His great undertakings, moreover,—the building of the

Temple, the fortification of Jerusalem, the erection of palaces in the capital and elsewhere, besides the laying out of roads and other public works,—led to the institution of a system of forced labour, levying a similar enforcement of unpaid toil, not only from the virtually enslaved remnants of the Canaanites, but from the general population of the open country—the free-born manhood of the nation; and what this implied we may imagine, from the sufferings of the fellaheen of Egypt, in our own day, from the *corvée*. It was no wonder that under such circumstances, discontent spread wide and deeply, or that men resolved to demand securities against the continuance of such abuses, at the beginning of the next reign; for, while Solomon lived, they could only submit.

The situation was rendered still more dangerous, politically, from the sectional rivalries of the tribes. Ephraim, as the greatest among them, and the heir, with Manasseh, of the traditional glory of Joseph, to whom, on the Nile, the Hebrew race owed everything, had always borne itself as the natural leader of its brethren. That Judah should, under David, have risen to the supremacy, and that Jerusalem should have become the capital, rather than Shechem, was a bitter grievance, which needed only some display of harshness, or want of tact, on the part of the house of David, the representative of Judah, to lead to the most disastrous results.

Such was the state of things when Rehoboam—the only son of Solomon, so far as we know, notwithstanding the great king's vast harem—ascended the throne, at the age, it would seem, of about forty. He was the son of an Ammonite princess, and, as such, apart from his father's

bad example, would naturally grow up with despotic ideas, alien to the hereditary freedom asserted and enjoyed by his subjects. Saul and David, and, indeed, Solomon himself, had been confirmed by the popular voice, in their sovereignty, before it was recognised, and the Ten Tribes, led by Ephraim, resolved that this should be repeated in the case of Rehoboam,—their acceptance of his rule depending on his consent to reform the abuses under which they had suffered, at the hand of his father.

In all revolutions a trusted popular leader is essential; and the man was ready, as well as the hour. Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, in the service of Solomon, had shown such ability and force of character in connection with the fortification of Jerusalem, that the king had promoted him to high office, as a direct representative of the crown, making him head over the fiscal and general affairs of the northern tribes. As such, he had the state of a governor, three hundred chariots forming his military array, to keep the king's peace in Ephraim and elsewhere. The murmurs of his fellow-tribesmen, however, and the facilities offered by his position, for raising a force, kindled ambitious dreams in his mind; and these took still deeper hold on him, from the declaration of a prophet, whispered in his ear, with all secrecy, that he would, one day, be king of the whole land, except Judah.

But his time had not yet come. Solomon, hearing of his treachery, had directed his arrest, and he only saved his life by fleeing to Egypt, the asylum of all enemies of the Jewish king. There, he found, not only protection, but exceptional favour, Shishak, the Pharaoh of the day, giving him a princess of the blood as wife. In Ephraim and the North his popularity was, perhaps, intensified by

his exile; for, on his return, at the death of Solomon, he seems at once to have taken the leadership of the discontented tribes, gathering their chief men round him, and even building a stronghold for his defence, at his native town or village of Zeredah or Zaretan.

Meanwhile, he acted with careful moderation. An assembly of the representatives of the Ten Tribes, very numerous in the aggregate, was convened in the pleasant valley of Shechem, between mounts Gerizim and Ebal, to which the grave of Joseph gave special sanctity in the eyes of a multitude, whose proudest honour lay in their descent from that patriarch, or connection with his name. At this great gathering, Rehoboam appeared with all state, to receive homage; but before it was offered, Jeroboam, as the spokesman of the occasion, came forward, no doubt with due humility, and begged that the king should promise to remove the oppressions laid on the nation by his father. Had Rehoboam assented, the disruption of the kingdom might have been delayed, but it could hardly have been permanently avoided. He acted, however, with a mad folly which gave Jeroboam an instant triumph.

Asking three days in which to prepare his answer, he sought the opinion, first, of the old counsellors of his father, who wisely told him to give way for the moment, and he would secure the abiding loyalty of the tribes. But to yield was against the grain of the would-be despot. Turning to the men of his own age round him,—flatterers, ready to say whatever they fancied would please,—he asked what they thought. “Tell them,” said they, “O king! that you are astonished at their audacity. It is for you, not for them, to dictate. Let them know that

you are master, and that, if your father kept them in their proper place, you are still more able to do so; that they will find your hand so heavy that even your little finger will be weightier than your father's whole strength; and that, if they give any trouble, you will increase the burdens your father laid on them, till they will think themselves no longer scourged only with the taskmaster's whip, but with a metal-tipped knout, which will sting them like a scorpion."

The foolish king, flattered into taking this insane advice, soon found his mistake, on repeating such haughty insolence to the assembly. Forthwith, an ominous cry, the very shout raised by Shebna when he revolted against David, rose far and near. "What is the house of David to us? What blood is there between us? Judah and David have a portion in each other, for they are one race; but Ephraim and the North are from Joseph! To your tents, O Israel; leave your houses; go out to the field and win your independence!" The revolution had conquered. Judah was helpless against such a rising. The whole country, outside the southern tribes, was in rebellion. Israel—that is, the whole Hebrew nation, excepting a small remnant, hardly boasting more than the petty territory, from Jerusalem, south—was lost to Rehoboam. Solomon's empire was shattered. Far and near, it had passed under the rule of Jeroboam.

JEROBOAM'S POLICY.

THE first care of Jeroboam on receiving from the Ten Tribes the sovereignty over their wide territory, was to fortify his western capital, Shechem, the present Nablus. Its central position made it very suitable for a metropolis and state residence, apart from its sacred associations, dating back to the time of Abraham and the patriarchs, and from its being the national gathering-place of the people, when summoned on great political or religious occasions.

It was, moreover, one of the pleasantest spots in the country ; for its very name, Shechem, means a shoulder, and hints at its being the watershed of the land ; abundant springs flowing from it, both east and west. He needed another stronghold, however, for the wide districts now under him east of the Jordan, and secured it by fortifying Penuel, a place now unknown, on the north bank of the torrent Jabbok, which runs in a strong bright flood, beneath high cliffs, to the Jordan. Gideon had, long before, dismantled its walls,¹ now rebuilt by the new king, doubtless by the same forced labour, for employing which Solomon had roused so much disloyalty as had cost Rehoboam the kingdom.

But the political relations of Israel to Judah and the nations round, were not the only matters demanding the

¹ Judg. viii. 17.

care of Jeroboam. Since the reign of David, who had raised a central tabernacle for the national worship, in Jerusalem, but especially since the Temple, there, had been finished, under Solomon, the aim of the southern dynasty to make their capital the religious, as well as political metropolis of all the tribes, had become more and more successful.

It was imperative that the religious centralisation planned by the house of David should, in some way, be counteracted, if the political independence of Jeroboam's kingdom was to be permanent. He did not think of introducing a new god; for, through all the history of Israel, the worship at Bethel and Dan was offered to Jehovah, as we see from the fact that, when Jehu destroyed Baal worship through the land, in his reforming zeal, he left the golden calves untouched; recognising them as symbols of the God of Israel. The ox, from its great strength, manifold usefulness, and fulness of life, was adopted widely through the East, as a symbol of the Godhead. It had, besides, in the case of Israel, the associations of remote antiquity to recommend it; for their forefathers had doubtless seen, in Mesopotamia, the ox-headed Moloch, and the human-headed ox-forms at the gates of great palaces. They remembered the calf-idol made at Sinai, and the sacred Apis and Mnevis of Egypt, the land from which Jeroboam had just come. It would, therefore, be easy to introduce a symbol with which the people were already more or less familiar, and to recommend it as supplying a visible emblem of Jehovah, which raised the holy place where it was set up, far above the empty holy of holies in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Two places were chosen for the worship of Jehovah under this symbol: Bethel, already holy from remote times; and Dan, where the idols of Micah had been venerated for centuries. The one spot would arrest the population of the southern districts, the other that of the north; and Jerusalem would thus no longer attract either, and imperil its new loyalty. The calves were, apparently, made of copper, covered with thin plates of gold, and were set up in temples specially built for them,—“houses of high places,” in the Hebrew; splendid enough, no doubt, to be counter-attractions to the rival sanctuary at Jerusalem, and, like it, built on heights, as specially sacred from their elevation towards the heavens, as if thus, naturally, alighting-places of the higher powers, rather than the lowlier ground beneath.

A regular hierarchy was also established for the public rites of the new temples, but, as priests and Levites from the legal tribe were not available, Jeroboam admitted to the sacred offices men “from among all the people,” though not belonging to the sacerdotal caste, the members of which, largely refusing to join the new movement, preferred to migrate to Judah, that they might be free to do duty at Jerusalem.¹ To the orthodox Jew, the rites of Bethel and Dan were, thus, corrupted, at once by the introduction of an image as a sacred emblem, and by the officials of the two sanctuaries being irregular, and hence, as was supposed, unacceptable to Jehovah.

Next to the Temple, the great feast of tabernacles was a special attraction to Jerusalem, which the new king felt it necessary for him in some way to counteract. It was the harvest-home of the year, and was known, by way

¹ 2 Chron. xi. 13.

of pre-eminence, as "the feast,"¹ because it was the greatest and most frequented of the three yearly festivals. It was held in the seventh month, answering, more or less, to our September; for the Hebrew year began with March, as the English one did till last century.² Jeroboam therefore appointed his rival feast to be celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth month; that is, in our October. The journey of his people, as pilgrims, to the southern capital, for the great annual holiday, would thus, he hoped, be checked, if not entirely stopped. The fifteenth day was chosen, as that of the full moon, — the Jewish year being regulated by the lunar phases.

The introduction of this new feast was made a great national event, in which the king himself took a prominent part, inaugurating the northern festival by going up the slope of the altar raised at Bethel, and burning incense to Jehovah,—thus consecrating, in his own way, the institution he had created for political ends.

¹ 1 Kings viii. 2.

² The English legal year began on March 25 till 1752.

THE GREAT DROUGHT UNDER AHAB.

OMRI, founder of Samaria, having need of as brilliant a marriage as possible for his son Ahab, who was to succeed him, had achieved what must have seemed the crowning triumph of his ambition, in securing for the prince the hand of Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre, formerly a priest of Astarte. The recognition of his dynasty by so powerful a state as Phœnicia, the richest in Palestine, and famous through the world, appeared to secure its consolidation and permanence, while the close relations between the two countries, thus allied, would doubtless bring material prosperity.

The result, however, disappointed such expectations. Haughty, greedy of power and splendour, fanatically devoted to the religion of Tyre, and, withal, full of energy and swift decision, which shrank from no outrage on the rights of others, had no scruples at deeds of blood, and demanded blind obedience from all, Jezebel swayed the less resolute mind of her husband, and stamped her own spirit on his reign. For the worship of Jehovah under the symbol of the golden calves she had profound contempt. In its place, Ahab must set up that of Baal and Astarte, the gods of Tyre, with its splendid temples, great trains of priests, and gorgeous ritual. It was with her as with the mistress of the slave in Juvenal: "I wish

it, and therefore command it; my will is reason enough." All Israel must do as she ordered. The altars of Jehovah must be thrown down, His prophets extirpated. To refuse obedience to the royal decree was to be held a capital offence.

Yielding weakly to the imperious woman, Ahab carried out all she demanded. A great temple of Baal rose in Samaria; a second, of Astarte, gave splendour to Jezreel, the country residence of the court. The prophets of Jehovah had to flee before a fierce persecution. Such as were not slain were glad of the shelter of caves, with no better sustenance than bread and water. The people, cowed by the ferocious energy of the queen, made so little resistance, that, after a time, there were only some seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Tyrian heathenism reigned throughout the Ten Tribes. Jezebel fancied she had triumphed.

But at this juncture opposition met her. Among the servants of Jehovah a brave soul, Elijah, came forward to offer battle, in the name of his God, to priest and king. He seems to have belonged to a village of Naphtali, but to have been forced to flee to Gilead for his life, and lived there when the narrative opens. He must have been one of those who had to wander "in deserts and mountains," and to sleep in "caves, and holes of the earth;" for he would not, else, have appeared and disappeared so suddenly as we find he always did, nor would he have been forced to go about "in sheepskins" or "goatskins" tied round him by a strap of hide.¹ The rough shepherds of some parts

¹ 2 Kings i. 8; Heb. xi. 37, 38.

of Palestine are still often clad thus rudely. Elijah, however, was no rough shepherd, but a man who had to live as he could, under a deadly proscription.

Jezebel was too hardened and fanatical for any hope; but Ahab had good in him, if it had not been choked, in its fitful beginnings, by fatal weakness. He might be approached. Suddenly, as he drove his chariot without his queen, the gaunt figure of Elijah checked him in his course. Coming to his side, the stern prophet abruptly delivered his message to the terrified king: "As Jehovah, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand [as His servant], there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Having uttered this fearful "burden," he was gone.

How soon the drought set in, is not told, but it seems as if it had begun forthwith. Strange to say, Josephus quotes from Menander the statement, that in the reign of Ethbaal there was "a want of rain for a whole year, and when he made supplication [to the gods], there came thunder" [with its heavy showers]. Meanwhile, even the hills and woods of Gilead, with their streams, so full and strong compared with the water-supply west of the Jordan, were no longer safe for the hunted man. The mysterious "word of Jehovah" therefore came to him, directing that he should turn eastward from the spot where he had met Ahab, near Samaria, and hide by the brook Cherith, that is "before Jordan,"—often the Hebrew expression for "to the east" of it. Hitherto this retreat has not been identified, various spots having been thought the right one. It may be that the deep gorge on the farther side of the Jordan, nearly east of Samaria, known near its mouth

as the "Wady Fakarith," or that north of it, which in the Middle Ages was known as the Valley of Elijah, was Cherith. No one can tell.

But there, wherever it was, Elijah lay safe, we do not know how long, till "the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land," his food being brought to him, we are told, day by day, by ravens, guided to supply him with bread and flesh. If his hiding-place was in Fakarith, or near it, he had found safety not far from Ahab's capital; but now he was to hide himself in the very land of Jezebel, amidst the heathenism she so dearly loved. Zarephath ("the [glass] melting huts"), now Sarafend, a village with ruins, about ten miles south of Sidon, near the coast road, was to be his shelter; a widow woman having been appointed by Providence to sustain him. At the town gate, as he drew near it, this widow, who little knew the honour vouchsafed her, was gathering bits of wood, to bake her last remains of flour, that she and her son might "eat it, and die." To find out whether she were the person to whom he had been sent, Elijah forthwith begged her to give him some water, and, as she was going for it, prayed, further, that she should bring him a morsel of bread. Answering with a solemn oath, to attest her truth, she could only tell him her story. All the flour she had was but a handful in her flour-jar, and she had nothing, besides, but a "little oil in the cruse," and the sticks she was gathering were to let her bake the poor trifle of flour in hot ashes, as a bite, before her son and she died of hunger. But she had sworn by Jehovah, and this showed that she honoured the true God, whose name she had invoked, doubtless because she saw that

the prophet was an Israelite; for to a heathen she could not have dared to commit herself thus.

It was clear that she was to be his divinely appointed sustainer; but he would not try her faith too much. While, therefore, still asking the bread for himself, he cheered her to compliance by assuring her, on the word of his God and hers, that obedience to his request would be rewarded by both flour and oil holding out, for his use as well as her own and that of her son, till rain was once more sent on the earth. Believing what he said, she went and did as he had asked, and found, day by day, thenceforth, that it is well with those who put their trust in Jehovah.

ELIJAH AT CARMEL.

THE terrible drought in Northern Palestine, as foretold by Elijah, had lasted half through the fourth year, and there seemed no prospect of change for the better, when the Divine voice roused Elijah to leave his quiet and unsuspected retreat in the roof-chamber of the widow's house at Zarephath, and once more throw himself in the way of Ahab, as the bearer of a special commission to him from God.

Things had gone from bad to worse since the prophet had fled from Israel. In her furious hatred of Jehovah worship, Jezebel had persecuted its public ministers to the death; those only escaping whom tried friends secretly aided, as Obadiah, the chief man in Ahab's household, did a hundred of the sons of the prophets, hidden by him in the rude shelter of hill caves, and fed on the humble fare of bread and water,—the best he could secure them. Jezebel's black-robed priests of Baal had doubtless offered sacrifices and made public intercessions, to bring down, by the favour of their god, the rain so terribly needed; but the sky still glowed like a brazen oven, and food for man and beast refused to grow from the scorched soil.

Things had come at last to such a pass that Ahab himself set out, with Obadiah, to search for whatever springs or pools might still, in any part of the country, be not quite dried up,—he taking one direction, Obadiah

another. Suddenly, as Obadiah drove on in his chariot, a figure stepped out before him, which he felt he knew. It was the long-vanished Elijah, whom Ahab had vainly sought, far and near, that he might please Jezebel by killing him, as the chief hindrance to the full triumph of her Tyrian idolatry throughout Israel. Startled as he must have been at the apparition, he was no less awed by the awful dignity of the prophet's office, as supreme representative of Jehovah in the well-nigh apostate land. Falling on his face before him, in profound Oriental respect, he could only await his pleasure.

Yet he shrank from carrying out the instructions given him by Elijah, to go to Ahab, and tell him that he whom he sought to kill desired to meet him. "I dare not," said he, "for the king has searched for you everywhere, to kill you; and now, if I tell him you are here, I may find you gone when he comes, and he will kill me for having deceived him, or for not myself having slain you." "You need not fear," replied the prophet; "I swear by Jehovah that I will assuredly show myself to Ahab to-day."

The king was apparently glad of an opportunity to meet his redoubtable antagonist. Perhaps he might get him to give way, and accept the religious revolution introduced by Jezebel; if not, he might arrest him, and put him beyond doing farther harm, by killing him. Yet a prophet, like the dervish of our own day, is too sacred a personage for even a king lightly to injure, and Ahab was to find that he could neither bend nor touch him. "Is it you?" said he haughtily, and in fierce anger, as he drove up,—“you, the troubler of Israel?”

Elijah had claimed a higher dignity than the king's, by sending for him, instead of going humbly to him; and

now maintained his loftier bearing. "You and your father's house; not I, trouble Israel," retorted he sternly. "You have brought all this misery on it by forsaking Jehovah and setting up the Baalim in His place. Why not put it to a trial, whether my God or yours is the more worthy to be the God we worship? Send and gather all Israel to Carmel, to meet me, and order the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, at Samaria, and the four hundred prophets of Astarte that are fed at Jezebel's cost, to come to me there. Then let it be seen whether they, in their multitude, or I, singly, for Jehovah, have witness from heaven for our God." Ahab assenting to so fair a proposal, the two parted.

The range of hills known as Carmel stretches northwest along the southern side of Esdraelon, ending in a promontory that sinks abruptly into the sea, but made up, through its whole length, of green rounded hills, in some cases eighteen hundred feet above the level of the Mediterranean, and seamed with countless larger or smaller valleys; the fruitfulness and rich verdure of the region, throughout, leading to its name, which means "a garden." Of these, one, about thirteen miles from Cape Carmel, was chosen by Elijah for the great appeal. From its top there is the last glimpse of the Great Sea, and the first of the wide plain of Esdraelon. From amidst a belt of fine trees, a line of precipitous cliffs rises, still bearing, as the name of its crest, that of El Maharakah, "the burning," or "the sacrifice;" an eminence visible over the broad sweep below, and also from the gentle slopes around. Here lay the stones of a ruined altar of Jehovah, amid an abundance of others, though the ground is open enough to permit of the trench which Elijah

caused to be made, being easily dug. Close beneath the flat plain on the top of the crest, is a copious spring, the molluscs in which show that it is never dry; and from this, a steep ravine leads to the Kishon, which, at this place, sweeps close to the foot of the two hundred feet high wall of rock.

To this place, on the day appointed, came vast throngs from every part of the land, and with them, at Ahab's command, but perhaps sorely against their own will, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal; those of Astarte having, apparently, been prevented from coming, by Jezebel. On one side stood the king and people, with the prophets of Baal in their robes and head-dresses; on the other, with only a single attendant, was the solitary prophet of Jehovah,—his rough sheepskin mantle over a simple linen tunic, both held in place by a strap of hide, and his long hair hanging down his shoulders, or blown about by the mountain breezes. Addressing the thousands around, Elijah demanded that their choice of Baal or Jehovah, as their God, should depend on the issue of that day's trial of their respective claims.

The Baal prophets were to have the first place. Let them build an altar, and lay a bullock for sacrifice on the wood needed to consume it, but they must put no fire under it; in due time, Elijah would submit to the same conditions. All was done as proposed, and the Baal prophets began their cries to their god to hear them, and send fire from the sky; for was he not the sun-god? But no answer came, though they kept up their wild prayers from morning till noon. In vain they continued their sacred circling round the altar, and repeated their cries to Baal with endless iteration, and cut themselves

with knives and lances, as was usual in the frenzy to which, like some of the dervishes now, they raised themselves, in their fanatical excitement. No voice or fire came from the heavens. "Cry aloud!" shouted Elijah, in mockery. "He is a god, you say; he must be musing, or gone aside, or on a journey, or sleeping." Still there was no answer, though they kept up their dances and cries till the time of the evening sacrifice approached.

Then, at last, Elijah called the people near, and ordered them to build up the altar of Jehovah that had been thrown down, using twelve stones to form it, in remembrance of the twelve tribes, now unhappily divided, but once united in a common worship of the God whom Jezebel insulted. The bullock was duly laid on the wood, but, to heighten the impression of the miracle he expected, a trench was dug, at his request, round the altar, and twelve barrels of water from the spring at hand, poured over the sacrifice, till the trench itself was filled with what ran off. Then, at the hour of the evening sacrifice, the din of Baal's priests having ceased, his voice was heard in earnest supplication to the God of his fathers to vindicate His own glory before assembled Israel.

Presently a flame from the cloudless sky shot down on the altar, so intense that, in spite of the water, the burnt-offering and the wood were consumed forthwith, and the very stones and dust calcined, while the water itself was licked up. At such a sight, the crowd, as they well might, fell on their faces, to worship Him whom such a triumph showed, irresistibly, to be the God they should follow, and the cry rose, "Jehovah, He is God!" Elijah's brethren had been remorselessly hunted to death by the priests of Baal, now so utterly discredited. These priests

would at last atone for their crimes against the prophets of the Lord. "Seize them, one and all," shouted Elijah, "and take them down to the edge of the Kishon," and thither, with the excited crowd and the whole throng of priests, Elijah himself hurried. "Slay them, every man," shouted the prophet once more; and the four hundred and fifty corpses were hurled contemptuously into the now stony bed of the stream, to lie unburied, till the flood, soon to come, would sweep them out, dishonoured, to the ocean.

ELIJAH AFTER CARMEL.

THE descent from El Maharakah—"the place of burning"—is by a long, steep, winding path, over rocks and through thickets, till you reach the great plain, 1300 or 1400 feet below the isolated peak, which rises, far above, from a slope thick with trees, into a wall of cliff some forty feet high. The level space, underneath, rough with loose stones and strong growths of all kinds; the ruins of a great cistern, now dry; and, below this, the famous well, cut in the rock, and never without water, are soon far behind; and you reach a shapeless knoll, still called the Priest's Hill, between the height you have left and Esdraelon.

There, perhaps, the priests were slain, while Ahab was as yet spell-bound by the miracle he had witnessed. But after a sacrifice there was always a feast, at which, it was believed, the Being to whom the sacrifice had been offered was present invisibly; as if, by such communion with the offerers, to express his having forgiven them and received them again into favour. Such a feast was now hastily spread, beside the altar that had seen the revelation of Jehovah. The profession of faith in Him as their God, instead of Baal, and the death of the idol priests, had been accepted as signs of national penitence, and the curse of drought had been revoked. Already the prophet heard the sound of copious rain, though it was still unnoticed by others.

Three hundred feet beneath the actual summit of the hill,—the south-eastern termination of the Carmel range,—the sea shows itself in the distance, from a shoulder of the mountain, which is about ten minutes' distance from the supposed place of sacrifice. Towards this height Elijah retired to pray, casting himself on the earth, his face between his knees, while he sent his attendant seven times in succession, to the point above, from which the heaving waters of the Mediterranean could be seen. The sky was still cloudless when the messenger returned from his sixth survey, but, after the seventh, he reported that he saw a small cloud rising from the ocean,—the well-known sign, in the Levant, of a coming storm. A wild hurricane was, in fact, rushing towards Carmel. Not a moment was to be lost, for the great plain below would speedily be impassable for the king's chariot, and the dry bed of Kishon would be filled with a roaring flood, poured into it from the hills, and from endless hollows seaming Esdraelon.

Leaping up quickly behind the swift horses, the king drove off in hot haste to Jezreel, the country residence of the court, twenty miles to the south-east, where, on the green slopes of Gilboa, or on the plain before them, rose a palace, amidst stately gardens, in which, perhaps, was Jezebel's temple of Astarte. Every one who has been in an Eastern city has seen the foot-runners, who, in gay dress, staff in hand, precede the vehicles of the great, to clear the way and announce the importance of him who follows. As it is now, so it was in the remotest times; and Elijah himself, to show his loyalty, when the king had proved himself, for the time, worthy of it, by his reverence for Jehovah, paid him this high respect,

Tightening the leather belt round him, and binding up his flowing dress with it, he ran, Arab-like, before the careering horses, all the way to Jezreel, through the ever-increasing storm. But at the gate of the town he vanished into the darkness; for, though fearless of open violence, he shrank from the secret imperious malignity of Jezebel.

Ahab had bent, as usual, before a stronger will in submitting to Elijah; but his wife was not so easily daunted. "The gods do so to me, and more also," she cried, "if I make not thy life, O prophet, as the life of one of the prophets of Baal whom thou hast slain, by to-morrow about this time!" Meanwhile, Elijah had fled to the south, only resting when he had reached Beersheba, on the edge of the desert, eighty miles off, as the crow flies. His attendant had followed him thus far, but here he was left behind. The excitement of the day, at Carmel, had sustained him for a time, but now a reaction followed the nervous tension. The death of Baal's prophets seemed far less vital than at first. Jezebel still lived, and he, the one representative of Jehovah, was a fugitive.

Profound dejection had followed its opposite. But the God he served so faithfully was nigh. Elijah had lain down in the shadow of a retem bush—the broom—found in the scorched landscapes of the desert, here and there, where nothing else grows, and grateful to the weary traveller for even the little shade it offers. Sleep soon overtook him; but he heard a voice bidding him rise and eat. Waking, he found a cake of bread and a cruse of water; still the only requirements of a Bedouin. Refreshed by these, he determined to keep on till he reached the sacred mount, Horeb, a hundred and seventy miles

from Beersheba in a direct line. But he went over the distance so slowly that it was forty days before he reached it, and for that long time, we are told, he ate nothing.

A cave is shown in Sinai as that in which Elijah sought shelter. As he lay there, asleep in the night, another vision was granted him, and the question seemed to be asked him: "What doest thou here, Elijah, away from thy work?" He pleaded that he believed he was the last prophet in Israel, and that even *his* life was in peril. The voice, however, told him to come out of the cave, and stand on the mount. There, God revealed Himself as He never did to mortal, before or since. At first, a mighty hurricane burst through the awful gorges of the mountain, rending off rocks as it swept past; then followed an earthquake, shaking the huge granite peaks; and, after that, the peals of an awful thunderstorm reverberated through the naked defiles, accompanied by blinding lightning. But Jehovah was in none of these. At last, in the silence peculiar to lonely mountain regions, and especially to Sinai, where the awful hush is broken by no sound of falling water, or of man, or beast, or bird, there stole over the prophet the music of a "still small voice." The supreme moment had arrived. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" was asked once more, and the same answer returned. Three commands were given, to carry out which he must return, and trust to that power which had preserved him at Cherith and Zarephath. Nor need he be so crushed in soul. He was not, as he had fancied, alone; there were yet, unknown to man, but known to Jehovah, seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

A lesson of abiding and transcendent meaning had been

given the prophet. He had trusted to sternness and force, but they were not God's way. He would yet see that merely outward measures could not restore religion in Israel. The still small voice of persuasion and reason was far mightier, and alone had the favour of the Almighty. His kingdom must be spread, not by the hurricane, or the earthquake, or the thunderings and lightnings of human passion, but by the gentler agency of conviction, roused in the heart by love, and leading to penitence and true reformation.

JEZEBEL.

LEAVING the Mount of God, Elijah turned once more to the north, in obedience to the Divine command. Passing into the Ghor, or sunken channel of the Jordan, the edges of which offer a wider or narrower border of arable land, he reached Abel-meholah,—“the Meadow of the Dance,”—a broader part of the river-bed, ten miles, as we are told, below Beth-shean,—the hollow secrecy of his route having protected him from the emissaries of Jezebel. Here lived a *shaphat*, or judge, a man of local weight and position, whose son, Elisha, in keeping with the simplicity of those ages, was at this very time busy with the plough, on the wide stretch cultivated by his father, in that sultry but fertile spot. The substantial comfort of the family was shown by twelve yoke of oxen being engaged with as many ploughs, on the tilth, at the same moment. The son of this well-to-do household had been selected to be Elijah’s companion and helper, with a view to his future succession to the full dignity of a prophet; and at the invitation of the champion of Jehovah, famous now, more than ever, by the incident on Carmel, he forthwith became his attendant, after a hasty farewell to his home.

Elijah vanishes at this point, for some time, from our sight; the dates on the margin of our Bibles making it no less than six years. Meanwhile, Ahab had repelled two attacks of Benhadad, the King of Syria, and thus

materially strengthened his position. But he was not happy. He had gained a high military reputation; his capital at Samaria, on its isolated hill amidst a green plain, offered one of the sweetest landscapes in Palestine, and had been shown to be well nigh proof against attack. At Jezreel he had a summer residence, on the slopes of the hills of Gilboa, with the vast undulating expanse of Esdraelon stretching far away from before it in every variety of rural charm, while the rounded hills of Samaria and the wooded heights of the Carmel range bounded the charming view on one side, and, on the other, the hills of Galilee, rising higher and higher to the horizon, looked down on the plain. He had a palace with its fountains gardens, and manifold delights; but outside the walls of his luxurious paradise lay a petty vineyard that was not his! How admirably it would join in with his own garden! He would himself speak to its owner, Naboth, a yeoman of Jezreel, who had inherited the spot from his fathers, and lived upon it. He would give him either a better vineyard, or his own price for it; and he could hardly refuse the king. But he had not reckoned on Naboth's strong affection for a patch of earth which his ancestors had owned for so many generations. What could be done for the king he would be pleased to do, but he must decline parting with his family inheritance.

Selfishness grows monstrous by indulgence, and in an Oriental despot everything tends to increase it. As his will is law, he gets to think contradiction in any case a crime. The highest official calls himself his slave. His every whim or caprice must be instantly gratified, at any expense to others, if things are to run smoothly. Ahab turned back to the palace in the worst of moods, fretful

and furious. Like a spoiled child, he could neither eat nor speak to any one, but threw himself on his bed, and turned his face to the wall, to indulge his sulky ill-humour undisturbed. Had he been left alone, his bad temper might have worked itself out after a time; but, unfortunately, his evil genius, the queen, was soon at his side. Like a woman, she was troubled that he did not eat, and that he looked sad. What was the matter? Then came the whole wretched story. "What!" cried Jezebel. "Are you King of Israel, or is Naboth? I shall show you. Get up; eat, and be yourself again. I will give you Naboth's vineyard." Napoleon before Leipsic, in answer to a remark about the slaughter that would follow continued resistance, asked, "And what are the lives of a million of men, to carry out the will of a man like me?" Jezebel felt like the Corsican. What was the life of a wretched vineyard owner, to the pleasure of a king!

She now dictated to the king's scribe, a letter to the authorities of Jezreel, commanding them to proclaim a fast, as if some terrible national wickedness had been committed, for which the whole community should humble themselves before God. Naboth was to be set at the head of the people in this public mourning, as if in honour of his exceptional worth, and of the estimation in which he was held; but, while the fast was at its height, and the multitude, with Naboth at their head, were roused to wild excitement at the sight of the black robes, the earth and ashes strewn on all heads, the loud weeping, the crowds lying all their length on the earth, the dark, unwashed faces and unanointed heads, the bare feet, the rent garments, and, in many cases, the tearing of the hair,—two worthless false accusers, of whom there are

only too many in the East, were to be let loose on him, with accusations of his being, after all, though now heading the fast, the cause of all this alarm and of the danger they were seeking to avert; for, said they, "Thou didst curse God and the king, and for this blasphemy we must all suffer, if the wrath of heaven and of Ahab be not turned aside by thy deserved death, as the law demands." In their frenzy, it was of no use to reason with the crowd, who knew nothing of the craven treachery and wickedness of their elders and chief men.

That Naboth should have brought them into such peril, and then have been hypocrite enough to lead the service of humiliation and penitence, as if he had nothing on his conscience, infuriated them; nor could their mad fury be appeased till they had dragged him out of the little town, as he was, in his black robe, and stoned him to death,—the ordained fate of a blasphemer. They would learn the truth when it was too late. Jezebel had achieved her purpose. "The vineyard is yours, now, Ahab," said she. "Naboth is dead for having, as the crowd believed, cursed God and you, and his ground falls to the crown." The poor king may have been innocent in the matter until now; but if so, the gratification of his self-will proved too much for his principle. Without a word of horror, or any hesitation in profiting by the foul crime of Jezebel, he forthwith set out to take formal possession of the dead man's property.

But there was One who had seen all, and was mightier than any earthly power. Ahab appears to have been in Samaria when the murder took place, and to have ridden over the low rounded hills to Jezreel, after hearing the queen's communication. He had just reached the coveted

vineyard, when, to his horror, he saw Elijah before him. Gasping out the cry, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" he could say no more, but had to listen to the prophet's denunciation of his crime, and prediction of its punishment. His dynasty would be extirpated; the masterless town dogs would lick up his blood on the very spot where they had lapped that of Naboth; and, as to Jezebel, these dogs would devour her, as she lay helpless and crushed outside the town wall. Selfishness, which, in its measure, is heartlessness, carries its own punishment in the moral death it induces; but it is also doomed, in many cases, to pay the penalty of the avenging anger of Providence, before the eyes of man.

ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION.

THE long service of Elijah was at last drawing to a close; for even when most lengthened, our days fly swifter than a post, and the night falls soon,—when our work is done. He knew he must ere long die, as all old men feel, but his love for Him whom he had so faithfully served was strong to the end. Before he left the world, he would fain, once more, visit the “schools of the prophets,” which had been the seminaries of the Church ever since they were first instituted by Samuel, the great reformer of the religious life of his people. To secure the continuance of sound teaching, and the fervour of godly ministrations, in the land, through future generations, that far-seeing and wise leader had gathered round himself, at various points to which he yearly came in his circuits from Ramah, as the supreme judge in the nation, bodies of disciples,—some married men, others in their opening manhood,—who lived in communities for the better promotion of their special aims.

Their numbers must have been large, for we find Obadiah hiding a hundred during Jezebel's persecution, while Ahab could assemble four hundred at a time, just before his death, and a hundred are mentioned in connection with each of the communities at Jericho and Gilgal.¹ They ate in common, went abroad in companies,²

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 6; xviii. 4, &c.

² 2 Kings iv. 40; 1 Sam. x. 5–10; xix. 20.

cultivated sacred music, and, in all probability, gave themselves to the multiplication and guardianship of the inspired records, as they were written. We know of such "schools" only at places associated with the history of Samuel: at Ramah, his own home, in the green hills of Ephraim; at Bethel and Gilgal, both, also, in Ephraim; and at Gibeah and Jericho, in the tribe of Benjamin,—the whole being thus in the heart of the country. That at Ramah is called Naioth, which means "dwelling-places," thus pointing to a separate settlement of these prophetic neophytes. Their communities were under the care of older and well-known prophets, on whom some of the members waited, as personal attendants, and from whom they received fatherly care, as we see in Elisha's feeding a hundred at one time, and in his paying the debts of another, who had died without the means of paying them himself.¹ They supported themselves apparently, in at least some cases, by tilling the ground or by feeding cattle, but they had doubtless other simple industries as well, to secure the modest living they sought.²

Now that the time drew nigh when Elijah was to leave the world, his fatherly tenderness to these associations, on which the future of religion in the land depended, impelled him to pay them a farewell visit. It does not appear, however, that they knew he was so soon to pass away, else they would not have urged Elisha so persistently to send into the hills and valleys, to see if they could find him, after he had been taken up to be with God. When he set out on this last journey, he

¹ 2 Kings ii. 3, 16; iii. 11; iv. 1, 42-44; vi. 1-3; ix. 1.

² 2 Kings iv. 39.

was at the home of the community in Gilgal, about five miles south-west of Shiloh, not the Gilgal in the Jordan valley, Elisha accompanying him as his constant attendant, since he was summoned at Abel-meholah to leave all and follow him. It seems as if, when we come near dying, the spirit craves to be alone, since, after all, we must really be so, even if friends surround us, for the soul has to pass by itself through the dark valley; and in this frame the aged prophet begged Elisha to stay behind, and let him go by himself to Bethel, whither an impulse from above directed him. But true love cannot keep away from the object of its affection. "As Jehovah liveth," replied Elisha, "and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they "went down" to Bethel; an expression that reminds us of the country sinking, more or less, as one passes from north to south, or, from the central hills, to the east or west.

Somewhere on the grey, rounded heights at Bethel, now so bare and desolate, but, then, more or less wooded, stood the humble shelters of a community of prophets, of whom the great champion of Jehovah-worship was the honoured father and head. Seeing him and his minister approaching, they naturally hurried out to greet them. Elisha knew that Elijah was very soon to leave them, though, as yet, he did not know in what way he was to do so. "Knowest thou," said they, "that Jehovah will very soon take away thy master from being any longer thy head?" "Yes," replied Elisha, "I know it; for who could question the signs of approaching departure so visible to all? But do not speak of it. I cannot bear that you should bring such a thought into my mind."

How long Elijah and Elisha stayed at Bethel, is not told; but the time thus given must have been for ever sacred to those who then heard the farewell counsels of one so honoured of God.

From Bethel, Elijah felt himself urged on to Jericho; and thither, notwithstanding the gentle dissuasions of his master, Elisha still attended him, perhaps unwilling to leave the now feeble old man to attempt the rough journey alone. The sons of the prophets at this second halting-place had, like those at Bethel, a more or less clear premonition that their great leader was presently to leave them; but Elisha gave them the same answer as before, to their questions on a subject so dear to them all. At last the prophet's charge had been given, and the time had come for him to go forth once more. The disciples would fain have gone with him, but he suffered no one to follow except Elisha. Fifty of them, however, eager to get a last look of one they loved so well, took their station on the rounded top of one of the hills overlooking the Jordan, and watched him from afar, as he receded from their view. He and Elisha had now reached the river, flowing on in its sunken bed. Standing on the bank for a little while, to make ready for passing over, Elijah took his sheepskin cloak, and, having rolled it up, as if into a staff like that of Moses, struck the waters, which presently parted, so that "they two went over on dry ground."

Now, at last, Elijah felt that the final moment had come. "What can I do for thee," asked he, "before I be taken from thee?" He fancied, one may suppose, that he was to die like other men; but God had special honour in reserve for so true a servant. "I pray thee," murmured Elisha, "let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me"—

that is, the portion of the first-born. "You ask a hard thing," replied Elijah; "nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." If he were caught away suddenly by God, or laid by Him, like Moses, in a grave unknown to man, he would not have his admirable wish; but if the parting was open, it would be the sign that he was adopted from above, in the fullest sense, as Elijah's successor.

What followed is best told in the words of Scripture: "It came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, art thou going? thou who art the defence and glory of thy race and more than the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" After that he saw him no more, and, in his grief, rent his clothes, as the Hebrews did when they mourned the departed. But the mantle of Elijah had fallen from him as he ascended, and this his friend eagerly took up, as a sign that his prayer to his master for a double portion of his spirit had indeed been heard.

ELISHA.

THE installation of Elisha as the successor of Elijah was natural, after so long and faithful an attendance on the great prophet, as his intimate companion and disciple. It needed, however, some formal confirmation by God, before either the new prophet himself, or the communities of neophytes over the land, could feel at ease in regard to a matter so important. But this was speedily vouchsafed. The mantle that fell from his master as he was carried away, proved the true symbol of inauguration to the high office; for, on Elisha's return to the banks of the Jordan, we are told, it needed only the smiting of the waters with it, to cause them to part as they had parted before, when similarly smitten with it by Elijah himself. The sons of the prophets living in the settlement near Jericho had, apparently, witnessed this second miracle, and, forthwith, recognised that "the spirit of Elijah" rested on Elisha. That they should reverently show their sense of this was natural. Leaving the height on which they were gathered, therefore, they hastened towards him, and "bowed themselves to the ground" before him, in token of his being received as their divinely appointed head. In the East, such prostration is usual in the presence of great men, and expressed no more, in this case, than loyal homage and lowly respect, implying

that they henceforth accepted his will and authority as their law.

That he should have come back alone, however, after such a tempest of wind, thunder, dark clouds, and blinding lightning as had made them greatly anxious for both, was a great trouble. What had become of Elijah? No hint of his having been taken up triumphantly to heaven fell from the lips of his loving successor. It seemed, indeed, as if he had simply vanished in a whirlwind, and Elisha said nothing, so far as we can judge, to contradict this belief. Nor can we wonder at their distress, for the inspired writer himself tells us that he "went up by a whirlwind into heaven;" that is, that he vanished into the sky in a whirlwind gust. The "chariot of fire, and horses of fire," mentioned just before, would, therefore, seem to be Oriental imagery, rather than a statement intended to be taken literally,—just as in one of the Psalms¹ we read that God makes "the clouds His chariots," and as, in Isaiah, he tells us that Jehovah "rideth upon a swift cloud."² In the figurative style of the East, the cloud, filled with lightning-fires, was a chariot and flaming steeds. Elijah himself, indeed, was, to his attendant, "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,"—that is, the strong defence of Israel against the invading idolatry of the age,—and was bidden a sad farewell by him with this tender homage. It seems as if the words had been a common form of honour paid to any one who was greatly valued by the nation; for King Joash calls Elisha himself, in his old age, when about to die, "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,"³—just as Elisha had used the words of Elijah.

¹ Ps. civ. 3.

² Isa. xix. 1.

³ 2 Kings xiii. 14.

Fifty "strong men," able to wander afar over the hills and down the stony gorges, searched in vain, during three days, for any traces of the vanished prophet; Elisha having unwillingly yielded to continued importunity in permitting them to do so. Yet he himself was so little acquainted with what had really happened to Elijah, that he waited in Jericho till they came back; if, by any chance, any traces of him might have been discovered. All that any one could say came, in the end, only to the recognition of the fact that "he was not; for God took him."

While at Jericho, which, in spite of the curse of Joshua, had been rebuilt, in these days, by a man of Bethel, on whose family, however, the doom, pronounced so long before, had fallen heavily,¹ Elisha had an opportunity of showing the contrast between his character and that of his great master. Elijah had been marked by his glowing zeal, which burst out in fierce judgments on the enemies of Jehovah, as when he slew the four hundred prophets of Baal, or, at a later time, froze the soul of Ahab by the announcement that the dogs would lick up his blood and devour his queen, and that his dynasty should be extirpated, for the crimes of which the murder of Naboth was the culmination. Elisha was, on the other hand, of a gentle and peaceful nature, coming, after the stormy Elijah, as the still small voice had, at Horeb, followed the lightning and thunder, and rending of the rocks. Elijah was a man of the wilderness, or, at least, of solitary and secluded life, appearing for a moment, only to vanish into unknown retreats; but Elisha was a townsman of Samaria, living, for his whole life, among his brethren.

¹ 1 Kings xvi. 34.

Moreover, whereas Elijah was the ideal of stern Puritanism, to which the least concession in religious matters seemed an affront to Jehovah, Elisha showed a gentle toleration and liberality by allowing Naaman, though vowed to the service of Jehovah, to bow in the temple of the idol Rimmon, when required to attend his royal master to public ceremonies. Nor is the contrast less impressive in other lights; for, whereas the fiery vehemence of Elijah, like the rush of a torrent, though mighty in its wild, resistless force, for a time, soon spent that force, and became a remembrance of the past, the quiet and gentle influence of Elisha endeared him to all ranks, throughout his life. "Elias the prophet," says the son of Sirach, "stood up as fire, and his word burned like a lamp. He brought a sore famine upon them, and by his zeal he diminished their numbers. By the word of the Lord he shut up the heaven, and three times brought down fire." Feared in his life, there was no public sorrow at his death, and he had to grieve, in his old age, that his work had, even so soon, proved so much a failure as to have left him almost alone in the land, to witness for Jehovah. But the king himself lamented over Elisha. The lesson of the two lives is to impress on us the far greater power of gentleness than of its opposite, though, of course, sternness is needed, at times, to stem the advance of evil.

The great spring—'Ain-es-Sultân—which still flows, full and clear, through the site of ancient Jericho, had an evil name, in Elisha's day, as unwholesome, and especially, Josephus tells us, as inducing unfruitfulness in the flocks and herds, or even in the human beings who drank from it. The elders of the town, which was still

in its first years, after being rebuilt, were naturally troubled by this; and, finding Elisha amongst them, came to him, begging that he might correct whatever was amiss in their beautiful stream. It is easy to imagine that, in its passing over some part of its course, it might have contracted qualities hurtful to man and beast; but the removal of these by the simple means employed by Elisha was, beyond question, miraculous. Asking for a new dish,—never in any way desecrated by an unworthy use, and thus fit to employ in a religious service,—he filled it with salt, the emblem of soundness and freedom from taint, and cast the salt into the water, at its source in the hills, proclaiming, as he did so: “Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or miscarrying.” “So,” it is added, “the waters were healed unto this day.”

THE RAISED SON.

AHAB and Jezebel had long passed away, and, with them, the persecution of Jehovah-worshippers, and the attempt to set up Tyrian idolatry in the place of the ancient faith. The golden calves were still worshipped in Dan and Bethel; but there was no need any longer, as in the days of Elijah, for prophets or confessors to hide in caves, or flee to the desert, to escape death. Elisha was living peaceably in Samaria, as an honoured citizen, in favour with the king,—probably Joram,—and was on the most friendly terms with the court. But though Samaria was his headquarters, the prophet did not confine his ministrations to it; his position as the “father” of the various “schools of the prophets,” and the demand, at different points, for his public services and instructions, leading him to travel hither and thither, apparently at stated intervals. Carmel, especially, was favoured with his frequent visits, as if some holy place among its hills, perhaps that on which stood the altar made famous by Elijah’s sacrifice, were a gathering-point, to which, on the new moons and Sabbaths, the faithful in these parts assembled to worship God, with Elisha as their presiding minister and teacher. The road thither from Samaria runs north from that pleasant spot, along the green hollows of fruitful hills, or over grassy uplands, till it passes down, through a rocky slope, to the edge of the great plain of Esdraelon,

a little to the west of the palm-crowned village of En Gannim,—“the fountain of gardens,”—now Jenîn. Straight north from this, the track runs to Jezreel, across part of the plain, which is here narrowed into a green bay, by the “mountains of Gilboa.” On the last western slopes of these hills lay the town famous in the story of Jezebel; and a little beyond it, reached by the same road, lay the village of Shunem, now Sôlam,—a poor hamlet in these later times, two hundred feet above the plain, of rough flat-roofed stone huts, with some olives and figs among them.

Why Elisha should have been in the habit of passing through this spot, on his journeys, is not told; but his frequent presence had been noticed by the wife of one of the chief people in the little community,—a woman at once of kindly nature and deep religious principle. Shunem was a fair day’s journey from Samaria, by the standard of Eastern travelling, and the prophet must have been wearied and faint when he reached it, after so long a ride on the slow-travelling ass. “Would he not honour her by accepting refreshment?” So, as often as he passed, he stopped at her house, and enjoyed her simple hospitality. She soon felt, however, that this was not enough. Each visit more and more showed her, that he was a “holy man of God,”—that is, a truly godly man,—and she wisely determined to have as much of the blessing of his presence in her house as she could. “Let us build,” said she to her husband, “for this excellent man and true prophet, a little room on the flat roof, as is usual in so many houses, and let us furnish it modestly with a bed, a table, a seat, and a lamp-stand, that he may stay for the night with us, before going farther.” It was soon

done, and from that time Elisha was always her guest on his coming through Shunem.

But, like all worthy natures, the prophet longed to show his gratitude for such kindness. Gehazi, his attendant, must ask if his master could in any way repay her, by a friendly exchange of service, for all her goodness. That he should ask, would spare both prophet and hostess embarrassment. Would she like him to speak for her to the king, or to the head of the "host," the dignitary next the throne? She might be pleased to be put into pleasant social relations with high society. But the worthy woman had no such ambition. She preferred to live quietly among her own people. She had nothing to ask from the great folks, but was very happy, as she was, in her comfortable, peaceful home. "Is there nothing, then, I can do for her?" asked the prophet, on hearing Gehazi's report. "She has no son," answered the shrewd attendant. It was reckoned a disgrace to be without children; and, indeed, what affectionate wife does not yearn to have a little one to love? "Call her," said Elisha; and forthwith she came, and modestly stood at the door of his chamber. "Next year," said he, "you shall embrace a son." It seemed too good news to be true, but it was so, notwithstanding. In less than a year after, she had a darling to clasp to her bosom.

To have is not, however, to hold. Blessings sometimes come, like passing sun-bursts, only to make gloom the deeper by the clouds gathering again after the bright glimpse. Years passed on, and the child had grown into a rising boy, able to go out, alone, to the fields, and full of life. One day, in the hot reaping time, he had strayed off to join his father, who was out among the men, busy

with their sickles among the yellow grain. Playing about in the midst of them, the fierce sun was too much for him. Going up to his father, he could only say, "O father, my head, my head!" and sank helpless. "Carry him to his mother," said the agonised father to one of the reapers; and on his mother's knee the poor boy lay, dying,—for by noon he was gone. What could she do? Broken hearted, and yet not without hope, she carried the poor little corpse to the prophet's chamber on the roof, and laid it on his bed, then shut the door, and went out to do what could be done. Might not he whose promise had given her the darling give him back to her? A holy man of God like Elisha had she knew not what power in Heaven. She would go at once to Carmel, six hours' ride off, at the usual rate, and tell her saintly friend the great trouble that had befallen her. A man attending, to drive her ass, which she kept at its fastest, Shunem was soon far behind, as she pressed on, with no thought of weariness, over the undulating plain.

At last, when she was still a long way off, Elisha, from his height, saw the ass approaching, and recognised her upon it. Always courteous, he at once sent Gehazi to ask if all were well; for her coming when it was neither new moon nor Sabbath, seemed to show that something was wrong. But she had no more to say to the attendant than the word used in greeting, "Peace," equal to our "Good day," and still pressed on. Riding up the hill to Elisha's simple dwelling-place, she sank at his feet and clasped them, too much overcome, for the moment, to speak. Gehazi would have "thrust her away," as taking too much liberty with the prophet; but the good man saw that she was in bitterness, and, while excusing himself for not having come to

Shunem, and thus saving her the journey to Carmel, from "the Lord having hid her sorrow from him," she was invited to tell him what it was. Then came the whole story. "Gird up your long tunic round your loins," said he instantly to Gehazi, "that you may run the faster, and take my prophet's staff in your hand, and waste no moment in stopping to embrace and salute any one by the way. Hurry on to this woman's at Shunem, and lay my staff on the face of the child." Perhaps he thought that, as the mantle of Elijah had been more than a symbol of office to himself, equally wonderful results would be wrought by his own staff. But the mother had a mother's heart. The servant was only a servant. Elisha himself must go; for was it not a question of restoring to her all that was dearest in the world, in her estimation? The good man, easily moved by a woman's tears, was in no mood to refuse her entreaties; so they presently set out for her home, at as fast a rate as they could. But it must have been slow at the best; for the Shunammite's ass would be very tired, and the prophet was not young. Meanwhile Gehazi had done his best, with no result. The child neither spoke nor opened his eyes, but lay dead.

Hours passed before Elisha and the sorely wearied mother arrived,—she after well-nigh twelve hours riding. Yet, if her child were won back to her, what mattered her passing exhaustion? Elisha, passing up to his roof-chamber, found the child lying dead on his bed. Shutting the door, he fell down by the side of the couch, with its pale burden, and prayed to Jehovah to give back life to the boy. How earnestly he did so, we may imagine. No doubt he wrestled for him with strong crying and tears. Then, stretching himself out over the body, mouth to

mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands, he remained, we know not how long, in fervent prayer. Nor was it in vain. Another proof was to be given that "the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working."¹ The flesh of the child began to wax warm. Rising for the time, Elisha went below and walked, for a few minutes, to and fro in the house; then, once more ascending to the roof, stretched himself a second time over the child. But, now, life fully returned. The eyes were opened; the boy was once more his mother's joy. "Call her," said Elisha. She needed no second summons; divining, we may feel certain, from the very tone of the voice, that her child was hers again. "Take up thy son," said Elisha. He stood beside the couch as the mother entered. It was true. Her son was alive again. To kneel at the feet of one who had such power with God, was a natural impulse; then, with sunshine beaming from her soul, through the tears she did not wish to restrain,—tears of delight, and of nervous excitement and religious gratitude,—she bore off the loved one, once more safe; nestling her one ewe lamb—oh, how tenderly!—in her bosom.

¹ James v. 17, R. V.

NAAMAN.

THE incident of Naaman's leprosy and recovery must have happened in one of those intervals of peace between Israel and Syria which had been so often broken by fierce wars. Ahab was dead, and Joram, his son, reigned in his stead. The trade-loving Phœnicians sought only gain, and excited no fear in Israel, especially since the alliance with Tyre through Jezebel. Judah, also, was connected, by marriage, with the Samaritan dynasty. But the possibility of trouble from Syria was a standing alarm to the northern kingdom; for, in spite of a previous alliance with it against Assyria, it had twice, in late years, invaded Samaria. Ahab, in fact, had at last fallen, in trying to wrest from Ben-hadad the strong town of Ramoth, in Gilead, which had been retained by Syria in the teeth of a formal agreement to give it back to Israel; and, strange to say, Joram also was to be wounded at a second attack on the same fastness, and to die by the hand of Jehu while still feeble from the misfortune. A succession of kings who took the name of Ben-hadad had reigned in Damascus, and, under them, as the *generalissimo* of their host, Naaman, a great soldier, had long been a terror to Israel, for the audacity and skill with which he had retrieved the fortunes of Syria after defeat, and for the fierce incursions into the Hebrew territory, by which he had spoiled and harassed wide districts. Indeed, it is

very probable that to him was due the defeat of Ahab before Ramoth-gilead, which was the crowning triumph of the Syrian arms in these years. At home, and in the lands around, his name must have been famous.

Honour so great, accompanied as it was with all the luxury and flattering elevation of the highest rank under the throne, seemed to make his lot enviable beyond words. But only the bird in the nest, that looks so soft and beautiful, knows of the thorn that pierces its breast through all. Naaman had been stricken with leprosy, and, as a leper, was apparently disqualified, not only from holding his great command, but even from mixing with his fellow-men. His outward grandeur and real misery were a vivid lesson of the vanity of human ambitions,—such a lesson as was given the world when the then Crown Prince of Germany rode, in magnificent uniform, the stateliest of all the twenty princes, who followed the carriage of Queen Victoria on her Jubilee procession, while, amidst the cheers and admiration he drew from thousands, he felt that the fatal disease which was to strike him down, after a three months' reign as emperor, was already gnawing at his throat. Leprosy was as hopeless, though not so quickly fatal, as the fell ailment of the magnificent German prince-warrior. Hope cast down her eyes. The sunshine of life hid itself behind the thick clouds of so great a calamity.

But what man could not do, was easy for God. Among the Israelites swept off from Hebrew territory, to serve as slaves to the Syrians, was a young girl, who had been fortunate enough to be chosen as a waiting-maid to Naaman's wife. Her mistress and she, no doubt, often talked of the sad trouble that rested on the household.

One day, however, the girl bethought her of the wonders known throughout Israel as done by Elisha the prophet, and made bold to tell her thoughts to the great lady. "Would God," said she, "my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy." Naaman soon heard this glimpse of hope, and it was forthwith discussed with the king, whose permission for the journey was needed. "Go, certainly, and at once," said Ben-hadad; "and I will myself send a letter to the King of Israel, asking him to heal you. Take with you, moreover, rich abundance of gold, silver, and fine raiment, as presents to all concerned, to secure their good-will." He evidently thought that the prophet was either head of an order of magi, or High Priest of Israel, and, in either case, more easily moved by a word from his sovereign than by direct appeal to himself. Besides, to heal so well-known an enemy, might be thought more than any Hebrew would be willing to do without a royal command.

The curtness of the missive, however, nearly ruined the whole scheme. On reading the Syrian king's words, Joram fancied he saw a deliberate purpose to fasten a quarrel on him, as an excuse for a new war. Rending his clothes in his agitation and grief, he appealed to those around whether it was reasonable to ask him to heal a man of leprosy. Was he God, to kill and to make alive? for only God could heal this terrible disease. Tongues, however, were as busy then as they are now, in repeating everything new; and a matter so sensational as the alarm of the king, at this supposed plot of the enemy, at Damascus, flew from mouth to mouth. Very soon spreading through the town, Elisha at last heard of it, and at

once solved the difficulty. Sending to Joram,—not himself going,—he caused the message to be delivered to him: “Why have you rent your clothes? Let the man now come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

The poor king, much relieved, lost no time, we may be sure, in conveying these words to Naaman, and the great man presently drove, with his chariots and horses, to the house of Elisha. The pleasant hill of Samaria had seldom seen so gay a cavalcade, and, assuredly, no citizen had ever before had so great an honour done him as was now shown to the prophet. Naaman had come all the way from Damascus, the bearer of a royal letter; he was head of the army of Syria,—his equipage and suite showed his high rank,—and he had come to the door of Elisha’s humble dwelling, instead of haughtily sending for him. Having shown such courtesy, he expected to be received as he fancied became him, for etiquette is very strict in the East, and it requires that a lower should always go out to welcome a superior in station. But Elisha, with a grand dignity, as befitted the representative of the King of kings, only sent out his attendant with a message directing the sufferer to “go to Jordan, and wash in it seven times, and his flesh would come again to him, and he would be clean.” “Is that all?” muttered Naaman in a rage. “I thought he would certainly come out to me, at least, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana, which flows, broad and clear, from the snows of Lebanon, through the streets of Damascus, and Pharpar, which flows into it, as bright and sunny,—better than all the waters of Israel; mere passing torrents

as they are, or dark and muddy, as Jordan is? May I not wash in them and be clean?" "Turn the horses," cried he to his charioteer, and drove off through the narrow street in a rage.

But anger is seldom wise. What it hindered the master from seeing, was judged more sensibly by his retinue. Coming to him, apparently in a body, their spokesman, modestly, but with evident judgment, strove to bring him to more sober thoughts. "My father," said he, "if the prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says, Wash and be clean?" Naaman saw his mistake. His pride and his foolish dictation of the mode in which he would expect to be cured, had led him astray. Now, however, with a fine manliness, he frankly admitted that he was wrong, and ordered his driver to take the road to the Jordan; the nearest one being down the Wady Farah, which descends to the south-east, and opens on the river, opposite the mouth of the Zerka. Or he may have driven north to Esdraelon, and thence descended the steep defile which sinks to Bethshean, with its ford, on the east.

Humility is the first sign of a healthy spiritual state, and, in this case, was the precursor of restored physical vigour; for, after dipping seven times in the Jordan, "his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." From what followed, however, on his return to Elisha, it is certain that even he did not fancy it was any virtue in the waters that had healed him; for he ascribed his cure to the great power of the prophet's God. Lowly, unquestioning obedience to God's command, had been rewarded by God's favour, as it is always, in some form or other, even now.

GEHAZI.

“NEAR the church and far from grace” is too true of many even now, and it was equally so three thousand years ago. Elisha’s curate, or deacon, Gehazi, chosen by the prophet to be his immediate attendant, and, we may believe, his prospective successor, might have been expected to show the virtues becoming his position, if only from habitual intercourse with such a master. Yet, suddenly, the meanest and most repulsive badness reveals itself in his character. As the leprosy with which he was smitten in punishment broke out, on the instant, where health had reigned, so far as one could see, till then, sin all at once gleams out in terrible hideousness, from a life till that moment credited with special sanctity. I have heard of a lady, in whose photograph, specks, small but distinct, appeared, to her great annoyance, over all her features, though no one could detect them with the eye. But a few days later they were explained. The searching light had revealed the beginning of mortal disease, unsuspected else. In a week or two she lay disfigured by a pestilent eruption, her beauty gone for ever. Gehazi may have been as good as other men until he gave way to temptation. But the bias to the special sin which overpowered him must have been in his nature, little as men dreamed of it in one so identified with a saint like his master.

Naaman had returned to Samaria with a full heart, after his cure, and once more drew up before the lowly dwelling of the prophet. Elisha had not come out to him before, that the honour of the miracle might be given wholly to God, undisturbed by any human intervention, which might have led Naaman to fancy that the virtue had, to some degree, come from the prophet. Now, however, he meets the Syrian, who, with all his retinue, stood reverently before him. What could be done to show his gratitude for so great a blessing? As a leper, the poor man had, like his countrymen, believed in the gods of Damascus; but now that the cure had been divinely wrought on him, which none of the gods of his own or other lands could effect, he was a changed man. "I have learned," said he, "and know, from what has happened to me, that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." Jehovah alone, from henceforth, would be his God. He would recognise no other. The cure had gone deeper than his flesh. It had waked spiritual life in his soul. But gratitude clamoured for some expression. How could he show it! Would Elisha accept a thank-offering? It would be a great favour if he would. The prophets of the nations around grew rich, by the gifts received from those who believed themselves benefited by them. Samuel had accepted a small gift from Saul; Ahijah had accepted a present from the wife of Jeroboam; Elisha himself, had taken a gift of bread and corn, which, however, he used for the good of others; and it was, indeed, the recognised custom for any one coming to "a man of God" to take some present with him.¹ But Naaman's case was peculiar.

¹ 1 Sam. ix. 8; 1 Kings xiv. 3; 2 Kings iv. 42.

No suspicion of interested motives could be allowed to lessen the impression, on his heart, of his cure being a free gift from the pitying love of God, to whom alone all thanks were therefore due. Nothing whatever, for this reason, could be accepted. "Well," said the Syrian, "if it must be so, I yield; but, I pray thee, let thy servant have the gift of two mules' burden of earth, to build an altar with it to Jehovah, on my return to Damascus; for, henceforth, I will present neither sacrifice nor offering to any other God but Him." The altar of earth from Israel would keep him in mind of its God, whose worshipper he had become, with his whole heart. He might have taken the earth, without asking, from any place, on his return journey; but he would fain associate it with the remembrance of the prophet. It has been thought that it was intended to form a sacred spot of Israelitish soil, on which to set an altar, in the idea that a god could be rightly worshipped only in his own land, of which, by a fiction, the soil thus transferred would be deemed a part. But Naaman had accepted Jehovah as the God of gods, with no local restriction, recognising that there was "no God but He in all the earth."¹ One thing more was to be asked. As a high official, the convert would have to attend his king to the temple of Hadad Rimmon, the chief god of Syria, and would have to prostrate himself when the king did so. It would only be a form, however; for his heart was true to Jehovah, and he would be worshipping Him, though forced to bow in the house

¹ Naaman's altar of Hebrew earth reminds us of the synagogue mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela, as seen by him at Nahardea, in Persia, built of earth and stones from Jerusalem. Altars of earth were common (Exod. xx. 24, and elsewhere).

of Rimmon. "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant," added he meekly. Nor did the sweet charity of Elisha turn him away. With a loving farewell, "Go in peace," he waved a parting to the great man, and the interview ended.

Now, however, came the devil's chance. Gehazi had listened to all that passed, with no such gracious feelings as filled the breast of his master. This Syrian, the arch-enemy of Israel in past days, a man passing rich, had been allowed to go off without giving Elisha even such a trifle as all brought him. He would run after him, and get something from him. Naaman's chariots were still near enough to be overtaken; so away hurried Gehazi, out we may suppose at one of the two gateways, still traceable on the hill of Samaria, and over the valley, to the upward slopes of the surrounding hills, where he before long overtook the cavalcade, the Syrian having halted on seeing some one running after it. Coming down from his chariot, as an inferior to a superior,—for even the attendant of the prophet was a great man to the convert,—Gehazi was asked if all was well. "Oh, yes!" said he. "But two young prophets have just come from the hills of Ephraim,¹ to the south of us: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver [about £300] and two changes of raiment." "Two young prophets, did you say?" breaks in Naaman. "Then take a talent, pray, for each of them;" and so two talents were sent back, carried in huge bags, by two slaves, and, with the money, two changes of raiment. Gehazi could not, however, let them be carried straight to Elisha's house, and had them left at the foot of the hill, where he,

¹ Gilgal and Bethel lay on these hills.

doubtless, put them in safety for a time, getting them taken to the house a little later, when, as he thought, he could do it unperceived. His plunder duly secreted, the wretched man "stood" once more "before his master;" that is, went in to wait on him. "Where have you come from, Gehazi?" asked the prophet. "Thy servant went no whither," answered the hypocrite. "What!" answered Elisha. "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and to lay plots thus for getting the means to buy oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men slaves and women slaves?" To lie would have been unworthy at any time, but to do so to get the advantage of one who was not an Israelite,—a man whose newly kindled faith in Jehovah demanded the most careful avoidance of any appearance of greed or selfishness in His representatives,—was a crime base beyond words. The thought of such wickedness overwhelmed Elisha. "Naaman has been cured of his leprosy," continued he to Gehazi, "but your sin has brought it on yourself, as a well-merited punishment. The leprosy of the Syrian shall cleave to you and your children for ever." It was a terrible sentence, and, we may hope, was mitigated, in after years, at least on the children; but, meanwhile, the unfortunate man went out of the chamber "a leper as white as snow."

THE ATTEMPTED CAPTURE OF ELISHA.

A PERIOD of temporary eclipse which had stricken Assyria in the time of David, had made it possible for that great king to found a powerful Jewish empire. Various countries, from the Euphrates to Lebanon, had revolted from Nineveh, but, having come into conflict with the Hebrews, had been subdued by them and been made their tributaries. This exceptional period of triumph was, however, very short; for we are told that Rezin, a Syrian leader, harassed Israel "all the days of Solomon," having first torn from him a wide territory, of which Damascus was the capital, from which he extended his power so greatly as to be spoken of as "reigning over Syria." The victories of David and the yoke imposed by them had thus been avenged; but the memory of its subjection kindled a permanent bitterness towards Israel in the hearts of the Syrian rulers, so that, from generation to generation, the two nations were nearly always at war. The King of Damascus in the reign of Ahab and Joram,—Ben-hadad II., or, rather, "Ben Hadar,"—"The son of (the god) Adar," kept up the feud with fierce pertinacity, invading the northern kingdom three times during his reign. In two of these campaigns he laid siege to Samaria and reduced it to great straits, though forced on both occasions, in the end, to raise the siege. In the other campaign, which followed the first siege, he was still more unfortunate,

being not only defeated by Ahab, but taken prisoner, though set free by a foolish magnanimity on the part of the Hebrew king, who paid the penalty for his weakness by his death at a battle before Ramoth-gilead, brought about by the perfidy of the Syrian. There had been intervals, however, of friendliness between Israel and Syria, through pressure of danger from the renewed vigour of Assyria, which, under Shalmaneser II., as he tells us in his annals, waged three campaigns against Damascus; Ahab fighting in close alliance with Ben-hadad in the first of them.

During the years between the Syrian defeat at Aphek and the second siege of Samaria, the almost chronic war between Damascus and Israel seems to have degenerated into a succession of forays into each other's territories,—such as that in which the Hebrew girl was carried off, who became a slave to the wife of Naaman. These raids had latterly, it would seem, especially for their object the capture of the Hebrew king, perhaps to soothe the wounded pride of Ben-hadad, for his own humiliation by having been taken at Aphek; but they were uniformly unsuccessful. The Syrian might plan with his officers the subtlest arrangements, based, no doubt, on information received from spies in Samaria: somehow the King of Israel always heard of them, and changed his movements so as to avoid the trap laid for him. Ben-hadad was greatly troubled; for it seemed certain that some one on his staff was playing the traitor. Calling them round him, he asked if no one would let him know which of their number was thus false, but was answered that they were all alike true to him,—the explanation of the King of Israel discovering the snares of Ben-hadad being that

there was a prophet in Israel who told him all that was planned in Damascus, however great the secrecy observed. "He knows," said the speaker, "even what your majesty says in your royal sleeping-chamber."

Against such a power the Syrian was evidently helpless; but, instead of ceasing to fight against it, the thought struck him that, if he could get hold of this wonderful man, he could get him to do for the ruler of Damascus what he was now doing for the lord of Samaria. Elisha—for it was he—was, it seemed, at that time, in Dothan, a small town of which some ruins and a well still mark the site. It lay on the south-east border of a fine undulating plain of rich soil, in a framework of green round-topped hills of no great height. The caravan route from beyond Jordan passes, from Esdraelon, close to it, stretching on to the south-west, down the slopes of the central hills, to the sea-coast plain. When I was at it, a line of camels was stalking on, with skins of oil and bags of wheat,—much like those of the Midianites to whom the sons of Jacob sold Joseph in this very neighbourhood. We meet Elisha in many parts of the country, as if he had gone from place to place, as the chief representative of Jehovah-worship, to keep it alive, and minister to its faithful adherents. Jezebel, strange to say, was still alive in Samaria or Jezreel, while the prophet was thus quietly journeying through the kingdom; and, indeed, he lived in Samaria itself, as an honoured citizen, at least after Ahab's death. Joram, that king's successor, evidently, hindered Jezebel from injuring him, taking him under his special protection, and showing him all possible respect and honour.

But now Ben-hadad had planned how to capture the

prophet. "Horses, and chariots, and a great host"—that is, a strong detachment of Syrian troops—were despatched to Dothan, and took up their station by night on the heights round it, so as to preclude Elisha's escape. His attendant, who filled the place of the unfortunate Gehazi, was the first in the little household to see them, which he did at his rising in the early morning. What was to be done? The Syrians would either carry them off as slaves or kill them. Hastening to his master, he told him the terrible news. But Elisha heard him quietly. "You need not be afraid," said he; "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And then, breaking into a prayer that the terrified creature should have his eyes opened, and telling him to look round, he saw that the height on which Dothan stood was "full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Meanwhile the Syrians closed in round the town; but Elisha, we are told, prayed to the Lord to smite them with temporary blindness, and the prayer having been heard, himself went out and volunteered to bring them to the man they sought. This, of course, he would do, as he was their guide; but he took them away to Samaria, where their "eyes were opened," and they saw, not only Elisha, but their own helpless position. In ordinary cases, their death would have followed presently; but Elisha was a man of gentle spirit, and induced the king, not only to spare them, but to send them off to Damascus in peace, after giving them ample refreshment.

The spirit thus sweetly shown marks the whole life of the prophet. He heals the waters of Jericho, to benefit the people round. He increases the widow's oil, to prevent her sons' being sold as slaves for her husband's debts. He

repays his hostess at Shunem by obtaining for her from God the gift of a son, the supreme honour of a Hebrew matron; and he restores the child to life when, in his boyhood, he had been suddenly stricken down. He replaces even so slight a loss as the head of an axe, lost in the waters of the Jordan. He makes the poisonous pottage harmless. He gives to the poor the presents brought him, and miraculously increases them, that none may want. In the agony of the siege of Samaria he foretells plenty. Always tender and loving, he is a marked contrast to his great master, Elijah, who smites the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and utters the terrible doom of the house of Omri. The one was like the thunder and lightnings of the vision at Horeb; the other, like the still small voice.

THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

It is very striking to notice how true great movements remain to the spirit of their origin. The characteristics of New or Old England may be traced to the beginnings of both; and so, no doubt, with all other communities or nations. The fragment of Israel which remained true to the line of David at the division of the kingdom, continued its conservatism from generation to generation so faithfully, that the royal line, thus deliberately adopted, retained its seat till the downfall of the kingdom. The throne of the northern kingdom, on the other hand, sprang from revolution, and revolution marked it till Samaria became Assyrian. Pascal says that imagination is the greatest of all powers, and, indeed, rules all things. In Judah, the sentiment of loyalty and the spell of a great name, coloured the story of each succeeding age. In the northern kingdom, the sword had opened the way to the crown, and it claimed to do so to the end. The same characteristic marks the religious history of each. The South remained true to the Temple at Jerusalem, with its sacred traditions and its continuous presentation of the ancient faith. And it was from the South that Judaism, now the universal creed of the Hebrew, and once the cradle of Christianity, was developed.

The North broke away from the past, and it kept drifting farther and farther from it with each century. The

calves at Bethel and Dan, and the irregular priesthood, led the way to a shipwreck of the old national religion. The Baal worship of Ahab found a soil ready for it, and the reproaches of Hosèa and Amos show that the moral decay kept deepening to the last. There had been gross oppression under Solomon, and Rehoboam had spoken harshly and unadvisedly; but it fared better, after all, with those who were true to both, than with their brethren, who fancied they had found the millennium in exalting Jeroboam. Yet the North proposed to keep on the old lines, except in the choice of a king and the reform of abuses. Jehu did not destroy the "calves" at Bethel and Dan, though so furious against idolatry, recognising in them only symbols of Jehovah. But a sacred ox was one of the forms in which Baal was worshipped among the Phœnicians, so that it was easy for the ignorant masses to confuse the heathen god with their own.

What scenes of heroism and tenacious fidelity to their convictions rise at the thought of the seven thousand who, in spite of Jezebel, had not bowed the knee to Baal! To have reduced the worshippers of Jehovah in the whole wide territory of Israel to so small a number, speaks of hideous, relentless persecution, and no less so does the glimpse of the hundred prophets living in caves, on bread and water, rather than abjure their religion. It recalls such memories as the dragonnades in the Cevennes, under Louis XIV., or the cruelties of Mackenzie and Claverhouse to the Covenanters of Scotland.

Meanwhile, from the safe retreats of Gilead, the strange, Arab-like apparition of Elijah stands before the very fountainhead of this fire-stream, King Ahab, and braves him to his face. He appears, however, now, as always,

only to vanish, as soon as he has fulfilled the commission of the moment, as if the enthusiasm which dared so much, gave way before human weakness, when it had accomplished its special aim. To be hidden safely and fed tenderly, not only within a short distance of Samaria, in the case of the torrent Cherith, but in the very home-land of Jezebel, at Sarepta, must have taught him, as it may teach us all, that the shadow of the Almighty is a safe retreat, even in the unlikeliest surroundings. Nor is the story of the widow's meal and oil without comfort to us, if we could take it; for, surely, to walk humbly and lovingly with our God, is to be remembered by Him in our evil day. The most touching lesson of trust in the heavenly Father I ever got, was from an elderly man, the keeper of the oldest mosque in Cairo,—I forget its name. He told me he had many children, and that for salary he could only reckon on a gift of a hundred piastres, less than one pound sterling, once a year, when the Khedive came on his annual visit to the mosque. "How do you keep your family on that?" I asked. "I trust in the All-Merciful," said the truly good man, looking reverently to the heavens. The Phœnician widow must have been like him, at least after Elijah's arrival in her house.

The weakness of Ahab in fretting so childishly, at the refusal of Naaman to sell him his ancestral vineyard, is striking in one who bore himself so nobly after receiving his death-wound. To make his chariot-driver hold him up in his chariot, all through the battle, lest his disappearance should unnerve his men, was a wonderful instance of strongmindedness. So near do contrasts and contradictions lie in us all. Jezebel's guilt in the matter was revolting, in its cold, crafty wickedness; but Ahab's

acceptance of the ground thus gained, sank him to her level. To take advantage of the badness of others, is to show that we only want the courage to be equally vile.

The scene at Carmel, when Elijah stood alone before the mob of his priestly enemies, his self-possession, his mocking consciousness of superiority, his supreme trust in his God,—all the elements of the picture,—realise a sublimity of faith in the Unseen which may well be memorable for all ages. At Horeb—"the Dry"—we have the Divine as compared with the human,—the still small voice embodying the heavenly mind and will, while these are awanting in the hurricane, the earthquake, the pealing thunderstorm and the accompanying lightning,—an aggregate in which the prophet might well see the counterpart of his own stormy zeal against the priests of Baal. That even so great a saint was yet so human, is a comfort to those, who, though they would fain serve God, do not feel themselves saints at all; and still more so, is the thought that, though he was a man of like passions as ourselves, the seal of high approval was, after all, so wonderfully set on his fidelity, in his departure from among men.

Yet Elisha, his successor, seems as if he had seen the weak point in his great master's nature. Perhaps in his quiet home in the ghor of the Jordan—if, indeed, he lived, as well as did his daily work, in a place so sultry—he had escaped the fierceness of the times, which stirred up the soul of Elijah to such a Knox-like sternness. He was, at least, a striking contrast to him in his spirit; living quietly in Samaria, even during the life of Jezebel; working miracles of love and healing, with few exceptions; tender in his charity to the Syrian general, long the foe

of his country, but turned to be the follower of its God: honoured even by the king, in his later days, as the father of Israel; a man of peace and gentleness; much more like the still small voice than Elijah had at any time been. In the incident of Gehazi, indeed, his zeal for the honour of his God made him, for the moment, terrible in his anger; but who can tell the evil wrought by the unfortunate man's sin? The whole lesson of the Syrian's cure was neutralised, and its whole influence at Damascus possibly counteracted; for, had Gehazi not thrown a sordid element into the relations of the leper and his healer, an impression in favour of Jehovah might have resulted in the Syrian court, of the highest benefit both to itself and to Israel. As it was, we find Ben-hadad presently harrying the northern kingdom by his raids, as if no effect had been produced by the miracle, and see him planning to kidnap Elisha at Dothan, apparently in the belief that to get him into his power would be to secure his magic arts in his own service.

SIEGE OF SAMARIA.

THE bitter hatred of Damascus towards Israel, due, perhaps; in part, to the remembrance of David's conquest of Syria, and the sufferings of the war of independence under Solomon, kept ever and anon breaking out into open hostilities during the reign of Ben-hadad II., as it was destined to do, after his death, till Assyria broke the power of the Syrian monarchy. This king had at one time been the ally of Ahab in a league against the threatened advance of the kings of Nineveh, but this had been followed by two campaigns of Damascus against Samaria, ending in the utter defeat of the former and the taking of Ben-hadad prisoner, which might have secured great results for Israel but for Ahab's weakly setting him free. Years of desultory warfare seem to have followed, each country wasting as much as it could of the other, by harassing border raids; but, in the end, Ahab fell before Ramoth-gilead, fighting against the implacable Syrians. Ahaziah's short reign has left no record of his relations with Damascus; but Joram, his successor, had to endure inroads, like those in which Naaman gained his reputation as a dashing soldier, and now, having been again invaded by Ben-hadad in full force, had to see his capital invested, and furiously assailed,—a sign that he had not been able to meet his opponent in the open field.

Samaria (Heb., "Shomron") stood on a pleasant rounded

hill, which swells up like a boss from a buckler, in the centre of a green undulating plain, surrounded at some distance by fertile hills. It could not have been a very large place, according to our ideas; but Omri, its founder, had shown his genius by the selection of a spot naturally so strong, for his capital. Escarpments are yet to be seen on some of the slopes; and high walls, with great castellated gates, rose defiantly round the whole town. In our day, it would be untenable, if an enemy held the heights encircling it; but there was no artillery in Ben-hadad's time, and Samaria, seated on its proud hill, could only be taken by blockade or by storming. The Syrians were able to cut off all supplies from without, and it seemed as if they would speedily starve the city into submission. So close, indeed, was the investment, that provisions soon failed so completely among the besieged, that, at last, the head of an ass—an unclean beast—was sold for eighty shekels. When it is remembered that the Orientals never eat the head of any beast, the intensity of the distress implied in their bidding such a large sum for the head of an ass may be imagined. The fourth part of a cab—that is, less than the sixth part of a quart—of a kind of small pulse known by the name of “doves' dung,” was sold for five shekels; the shekel being equal to about two shillings and sixpence.

Meanwhile, the king was manfully doing his best, carefully making circuits of the walls, inside the parapets, to visit the different watch-posts, and to take advantage of anything in his favour. On one of these rounds, however, the extremity of the wretchedness now endured was brought keenly home to him. A woman having loudly implored his help as he passed, he could only answer that

he was, alas! unable to do anything for her. God, only, he said, could relieve her wants. But her looks awakened his sympathy. "What aileth thee?" asked he; and then she told him how she and another woman had agreed to kill and eat each other's child, and how her child had been boiled and eaten, but now the other woman drew back from her bargain, and had hidden her boy. Horrified at the story, the king rent his clothes, as Orientals do in moments of deep distress. He was already sad enough; for it was seen, through his torn robe, that he was wearing rough sackcloth next his skin,—the expression of deep humiliation and penitence.

But this formal repentance for personal or national sins had left him unchanged in his inner self. Elisha had counselled resistance, and the woman's story was the result. "God do so to himself, and more also, if the prophet's head stood on him an hour longer." He could blame the prophet, but all his sorrow had not taught him the first step towards a better mind, by blaming himself. Meanwhile, Elisha was quietly sitting in his house with the elders of the city, who had come, we may suppose, to take counsel with him. Suddenly turning to them, he told them that the king—a true son of Ahab, the murderer of the prophets and of Naboth, and himself now bent on murder—had sent a messenger to behead him. They must refuse him admission; for the king would be sorry for his command as soon as he had given it, and would follow, in haste, to prevent its execution. It was indeed so. While the soldiers still parleyed with the elders, outside the door, the king appeared, his fury gone, his spirit changed. "Behold," said he to Elisha, "this evil is of the Lord. He has willed that we open

the gates to the Syrian. Why should I wait for deliverance any longer?" The horrors he had heard seemed to tell him that hope of aid from God was vain; that surrender was inevitable. What had the prophet to say? "Hear the word of the Lord," replied he. "To-morrow, about this time, a seah—that is, a peck—of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two pecks of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." "What!" said the officer on whom the king leaned, "if God make windows in heaven, and rain down flour and barley, that may be, but not otherwise." "You will see it," answered Elisha, "but will taste neither."

Meanwhile, crouching outside the gate of the city, the law of Moses not letting them live inside,¹—as, indeed, even ordinary Eastern custom would have ordained,—sat four lepers, whom no one in the city fed any longer, and who were, hence, in the sorest straits. Feeling that, even if they got into Samaria, they would die of famine, while, if they sat where they were, they were no better off, they resolved, as soon as it was dark, to steal out to the Syrian camp. But when they had reached the nearest part of it, strange to say, they found the ground deserted. Wandering farther, it was still the same. The Syrians were gone. The Lord, says the sacred narrative, "had made them hear a noise of chariots, and of horses, even the noise of a great host," and panic had seized them. Joram, they fancied, had hired the kings of the Hittites, from the north, and the kings of Egypt, from the far south. So wildly does fear alarm itself, by inventing imaginary terrors. Forthwith their only thought was to save their lives, leaving the camp as it was, with their tents, their stores, their

¹ Lev. xiii. 46; Num. v. 3, &c.

baggage, horses, and asses. It was a grand time for the poor lepers. Entering one of the tents,—one, we may be sure, that promised well,—they ate and drank to their heart's content, and then proceeded to plunder it, and a second one, of silver, gold, and raiment, which they carried off and hid. But it would be dangerous to wait till daylight without telling, in the city, how matters stood. Coming back, therefore, to the warders at the gate, or on the walls, they broke the great news to them.

A few minutes served to repeat it in the king's palace. But Joram was incredulous. It was only a feint, to draw them from the city, and swoop down on them. "But, my lord," answered one near, "whatever may happen to any who are sent out, it cannot be worse than has happened to so many of us within, already, and as must happen to us all, if they do not confirm the good news. Pray, suffer some men to go out and bring us back word." Two chariots with horses were therefore sent off, but only to find that the Syrians were in full retreat across the Jordan, in such terror, that the way was strewn with "garments and vessels," which they had thrown away in their haste. Returning, and announcing the great deliverance wrought for them, the gates were opened, and the famished citizens, old and young, let loose on the rich supplies of the Syrian tents and magazines. In one night misery had passed away, and next day Elisha's words as to the price of fine flour and of barley came true. It is added, however, that the officer who had sneered at the assurance, having been in command at the gate, was thrown down in the wild crowding of the people after food, and perished without tasting the spoil.

JEHU.

ON the day when Elijah suddenly appeared on the way, to Ahab, and denounced a curse on him and his house for the murder of Naboth, there rode, in attendance on him, in the chariot following that of the king, an officer of his army, destined to work the fulfilment of the awful words he then heard from the lips of the prophet. It was Jehu, a fiery and resolute soldier, with no pity in his nature, of boundless ambition, and with a power of smooth-faced dissimulation, worthy of one who was to be a successful conspirator on the greatest scale. Years passed; but, though the ominous words of Elijah had sunk deep in his heart, he bore himself so graciously, and with such apparent loyalty, that he steadily rose, till he gained the position of captain of the host, or commander-in-chief, which placed him next the royal family in dignity.

The old quarrel of the retention of Ramoth, in Gilead, by Syria, in the face of treaty obligations to restore it to Israel, still prolonged hostilities between the two nations. Ahab had died under its walls, and now Joram, his son, had been forced to go back to Jezreel, from before it, to recover from a wound received in its attack; the command, in his absence, passing, as a matter of course, to Jehu. Ahab's death had hindered any successful revolution, for the time; but the temporary helplessness of his son, and the position it gave Jehu, brought the fitting

moment. A prophet had first, apparently, kindled the idea of conspiracy in the mind of the traitor, and now a second was finally to stimulate his brooding purpose into fierce action. Suddenly, while Jehu was sitting in counsel with his officers, a young prophet, sent by Elisha, appeared before him, his outer coat girt up, as with runners or men in great haste, and, calling him apart, to the innermost room, where he was absolutely alone, solemnly anointed him king; telling him, as he did so, that the especial reason of his elevation was that he might exterminate "the whole house of Ahab," as utterly as their destroyers had rooted out the dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha. This said, the visitor fled. "Who was he?" rose from all lips. But Jehu for the moment prevaricated, to gather his thoughts. Presently, however, he told his staff. He had taken care to be popular with all who could help him; and while the king had been undermined by intrigues, his submission to Jezebel had ruined him, at least with the army. A shout rose at once from all the officers present, hailing Jehu as king, and the whole force joined in the cry, when the usurper, brought out to the top of the stair leading to the flat roof, and seated on an extemporised throne, with bright war cloaks for tapestry, at his feet, was shown to the soldiery as their new monarch. Wild flourishes of trumpets rent the air. Jehu was their king! Military revolutions had marked all the past of the northern kingdom, and continued to be its characteristic to the end. It was a military, not a popular, monarchy.

No time, however, was to be lost. Chariots having been ordered, Jehu, with a detachment, rode off with a wild speed, for which he was notorious, down the ravines, to

the Jordan, and, thence, up the defile behind Beisan, to Jezreel, that he might reach it before news of the revolt had spread. The warder on the tower there, seeing chariots dashing toward him, sounded the alarm, and a rider was sent off to find out who approached. But he was not allowed to return; and a second was, in the same way, detained. At last Joram felt sure it was Jehu, from his reckless driving, and, in his anxiety to know why the army had thus been left, himself rode out to learn. "Has Hazael made peace?" shouted he, as he got near the traitor. Jehu's answer showed his mood. The king, like his father, had let his hated mother rule, and this was a revolt against him, on her account. Muttering to Ahaziah of Judah, his sister Athaliah's son, who rode beside him in a second chariot, that treason was afoot, he turned and fled, but only to fall out of his chariot, the next moment, mortally wounded by an arrow from Jehu's bow. To throw his body into what had been the vineyard of Naboth stopped progress for a few moments, and enabled Ahaziah to gain the rough pass to the south, near Engannim; but there he, too, was overtaken and fatally wounded; dying at the town of Megiddo, near at hand.

Jezebel, now a woman of about sixty, had seen all, and, brave to the last, resolved either to make a conquest of Jehu or to defy him to his worst. "What came of Zimri that murdered his master?" cried she, as Jehu approached. But the next moment, the poor painted and tyred old woman, vain even in her agony of excitement, was hurled down from the window, at Jehu's command, by some eunuchs, and lay there till the town-dogs, at nightfall, finding the corpse, devoured it, all but the skull, the palms, and the soles of her feet.

This, however, was not enough. Eastern policy, on the rise of a new dynasty, and too often even on the accession of a new monarch, is satisfied only by the extirpation of all branches of the former king's family. Seventy sons of Ahab—for polygamous families of Oriental sovereigns are often enormous—were presently put to death at Samaria, and their heads sent to the new ruler; and forty-two princes of the royal house of Judah, coming on a visit to Joram, in ignorance of his death, shared the same fate. The dynasty of Omri was exterminated, and the curse of Elijah fulfilled.

According to his light, Jehu was a fanatical opponent of Jezebel's heathen innovations, and loyal to the old national God, Jehovah. But his only ideas of reformation were those of a cruel and bloody mind. Summoning to Samaria all the followers of Baal, as if to a grand festival in honour of the god, he drew together a vast assembly into the grounds of the heathen temple, pretending to be himself an idolater; but when they were once helplessly shut in, he caused them to be hewn down to the last man. Elijah had slaughtered the priests of the idol; but Jehu killed a vast multitude of his countrymen, led into a snare by his hypocritical treachery. The one idea, apparently, in his mind, was to prevent any counter-revolution. He would secure his throne by leaving no one alive who could disturb him. Jehovah-worship, which was still dear to the hereditary instincts of the nation, though of little influence on its general character, was duly restored, but in the form established by Jeroboam at the founding of the kingdom; the golden calves being retained, at Bethel and Dan, as the symbols of the God of their fathers.

Dreading the power of Damascus under Hazael who

had succeeded to the throne by murdering Ben-hadad the king, Jehu took the further step, in addition to his restoring the worship of Jehovah, of becoming a tributary of Shalmaneser II., the mighty ruler of Nineveh. His payment of the amount imposed on him by Assyria, is still represented to us in a series of small sculptures on a miniature obelisk, fortunately recovered from the ruins of the Assyrian capital. The bearers of the gifts are dressed in long sacks, elaborately fringed, without sleeves, and carry bars of silver and gold, gold in plates, gold table-utensils, gold drinking-vessels, bars of lead, a sceptre for the Great King, spears, and other articles of value; hardly any of them, however, such as the territory of the northern kingdom yielded. We have thus a glance at the social development of the country in Jehu's time, revealing a progress in metallurgy and the textile arts which might not have been expected, though the great mass of the people were probably far too poor to indulge in luxury. Jehu's reign, under the protection of Assyria, was comparatively quiet, and he had the advantage of Elisha living permanently under him in Samaria; for the prophet continued to witness for God more than forty years after Jehu's accession, though he took no prominent part in public affairs. Jehu reigned in all twenty-eight years, and left his throne to his son,—a monument of the difference between ferocious orthodoxy and essential religiousness; for no one could have shown more of the one, or less of the other, so far as his public acts reveal him.

JEROBOAM II. AND THE PROPHET JONAH.

IN the notices left us of the reign of Jeroboam II. of Samaria, the fourth king of the house of Jehu, we read that "he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath," in the valley of the Orontes, north of Damascus, "unto the sea of the Arabah," that is, the Dead Sea, "according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher,"—now the village El Mesh-hed, three miles north-east of Nazareth, where what is called the tomb of Jonah is still shown.¹ Jeroboam II. reigned, apparently, from B.C. 823 to B.C. 772; and as the Jonah of the prophetic book known by that name is said to have been "the son of Amittai," he may with safety be identified with the prophet of the days of that king, so that we thus learn in what age he lived.

The word of the Lord, we are told, came to Jonah, commanding him to "arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it," because its wickedness had "come up before" God. A mission to rouse the abhorred Assyrian to repentance was, however, so distasteful to the prophet, as he himself tells us,² that, rather than be the instrument of saving from Divine wrath such a heathen place,

¹ "Survey of Western Palestine." *Memoirs*, I., 365.

² *Jonah* iv. 1, 2.

hateful to an Israelite, he resolved, instead of going to the east, as he was enjoined, to betake himself to the very farthest west. It seems, indeed, as if he had the idea that, by doing so, he would have withdrawn himself "from the presence of the Lord;" as if God were, in his mind, only a local divinity, ruling over Israel, but unable to see the fugitive if he fled far enough beyond His territory.

Going down from his hills, therefore, to Joppa, he found in the roadstead there—for there is no harbour fit for more than boats, and dangerous rocks fringe the shore—a Phœnician Tarshish-ship, a name—like that of our "East Indiamen," of old days,—for the great vessels of Tyre or Sidon which traded with distant ports; the one for which this particular ship was bound being actually Tarshish, a town, or district, of Spain, outside the Straits of Gibraltar.¹ A description of one of these famous vessels, given by Ezekiel,² tells us that its timbers were cypress wood from Hermon; its masts, cedars of Lebanon; its oars, of the oak of Bashan; its deck, of larch from the islands of the Levant, at times inlaid with ivory; its sails, of costly Egyptian linen; the awning over its deck, dyed with rich blue and purple, of great price, from the Grecian factories of Laconia. To man such a floating palace, we are told, sailors, steersmen, rowers, ship carpenters, and fighting men, were gathered from the places where the best of each class were to be had. Of course, ancient ideas of grandeur in naval architecture have to be remembered, but, still, a "Tarshish ship" must have been an imposing creation.

¹ There is no certainty as to the exact position of Tarshish. Some think it is now represented by Cadiz; others question this. It may have been the native name of a district on the coast.

² Ezek. xxvii. 4 ff.

Paying the fare to Tarshish, Jonah went on board, going down into its cabins to hide himself from all, and perhaps, in his simplicity, from God! The ship was on the point of sailing, and so, without delay, he found himself on the way to the far-distant west. Violent storms, however, often sweep the coast of Palestine, and one of these, we are told, ere long put the ship in great danger. The huge waves threw themselves down on it, as if they would break it in pieces, and at last a panic arose; even the crew thinking that only death was before them. As Phœnicians, each of them had his favourite god, and nothing was now to be heard but wild cries from all, to the higher powers in which they trusted. Still, the sea heaved and the wind raged. Sorely to their distress, the supercargoes of goods on board saw their wares thrown into the waves to lighten the ship, but even that did not bring safety.

Meanwhile, Jonah had made his way to the lowest part of the ship, as most secret, and lay fast asleep, amidst all the wild tumult of nature and of his despairing fellow-men. His conscience had driven him to this gloomy solitude, and weary nature had yielded to a merciful reaction, in slumber, from the strain on his thoughts. At last the captain came upon him. "What did he mean," asked the sailor, "by lying there?" Get up and call on your God; perhaps He will think of us, and save us; no others of the gods to whom we are all appealing seems to pay us any attention. Whether the prophet complied or not, the storm raged none the less. Something more must be done. What could have led the gods to send such a hurricane upon them? There must be some one on board who had especially roused their anger; and if they could find him

out, they might hope that the wrath of Heaven would be appeased, and the ship saved. They would cast lots, that they might know "for whose cause this evil" had come upon them. The lot fell on Jonah. What had he to say for himself? what was he? of what country? of what people? "I am a Hebrew," said he, "and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land, and I am a guilty man; for I have fled from His presence." They had found out the cause of their trouble, as they rightly thought; but what was to be done? Stout sea heroes as they were, they were "exceedingly afraid;" for Jonah's story alarmed their superstitious minds beyond measure, especially as the sea grew more and more tempestuous. "Take me up to the deck," said Jonah, "and throw me into the sea, and it will be calm; for I know this great storm has come on you for my sake."

But the honest fellows were loathe to take him at his word, and the poor rowers, at their different banks of oars, plied the long sweeps more earnestly than ever,—if, by any means, they could get back to the land. It was impossible to make headway, however, and the ship seemed likely to founder. It appeared as if they must sacrifice Jonah, as he had himself proposed. Yet the fear of bringing fresh wrath on themselves, from above, if he were innocent, alarmed them. They were heathen, but they would make peace with Jonah's God, by telling Him their straits, before taking the final step. "We beseech Thee, O Jehovah," cried out one, speaking for them all, "let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased Thee,"—the lot falling on this man, his own story, and the awful storm, tell us that it is sent on his account!

Now, at last, Jonah was taken to the deck, and cast into the sea; and lo, it "ceased from its raging." Awed by the sight, the crew, so wonderfully saved, at once returned thanks to Jehovah by killing a beast on the deck, as a sacrifice of grateful worship, and vowed to offer others as soon as they landed. But Jonah was not to perish. "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." What kind of fish or sea creature it was, has been the subject of many conjectures. There are sharks which can swallow a man entire; and they are not uncommon, we are told, in the Mediterranean. Naturalists tell us, moreover, that sharks have the power of throwing up again, whole and alive, the prey they have seized, though it is not said whether this is applicable to a case like that of the prophet. Darwin speaks of a "globe-fish," or diodon, being frequently found floating, alive and distended, in the stomach of a shark. But all this does not really explain the incident of Jonah's preservation. It is, in fact, impossible to understand it, apart from miraculous interference on his behalf; but the power which kept alive the "three children" in the burning fiery furnace was no less able to preserve the prophet in his strange prison-house.

NINEVEH.

IN the time of Jeroboam II., during whose reign Jonah lived, the terror of Assyria hung like a great war cloud, ominous and dark, over the nations of Western Asia. Syria trembled in the prospect of final overthrow; Samaria was thankful to kiss the feet of the Great King, and purchase his forbearance by lavish tribute. Nineveh reigned, in its magnificence, on the far away Tigris, rich with the spoil of many nations. Fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet high, guarded walls round four cities, in a long quadrangle of sixty miles, rising to the height of a hundred feet, in such mighty strength, that even their top was a broad highway on which three chariots could drive abreast. Within the vast space thus enclosed,—three days' journey in their circuit, by the Jewish reckoning of twenty miles to a day,—rose palaces of almost inconceivable size and grandeur, amidst gardens and grounds, in which the highest art had created every beauty that could gratify pride or ravish the senses. Within the last generation, the grey mounds under which all their stones had for millenniums been buried, have yielded up remains of great buildings, sculptures, inscriptions, the contents of huge libraries, stamped on clay tablets, and much else, which have filled the civilised world with amazement. One palace alone, disclosed, in its ruins, by the toil of the explorer,

revealed twenty-seven huge gates of entrance, guarded by colossal human-headed bulls and gigantic lions, and seventy-one halls and chambers, adorned throughout, round all their sides, by great squares of alabaster, covered with sculptures of the warlike deeds of the "king of kings" and varied scenes from civil or military life. These mighty structures are of various dates, but some of them were in their splendour in the days of Jonah. When it is remembered that the palaces stood on raised platforms of sun-dried brick, to add to their grandeur, and perhaps to their healthiness, it is hard to realise the expenditure of treasure, or of human labour,—the forced toil of innumerable prisoners of war and slaves,—which such piles of sun-dried brick involved.

But palaces were not the only wonders of the different quarters, or rather cities, included in the general name of Nineveh. Vast temples, built in stages, each less in its square than the one below it, rose like mighty pyramids into the sky, their tops the supreme sanctuary of the god to whom, especially, the whole was dedicated, and also the lofty observatories from which consecrated observers of the heavens, watched and recorded the movements of the stars and planets, as signs of the future, for good or evil, to individuals and nations. In such a military capital there must, moreover, have been provision for a very numerous soldiery, whose pomp and glitter and resounding music, no doubt continually animated the scene. To secure the population, as far as possible, from the danger of famine, in case of war, vast spaces within the walls were devoted to tillage or pasture, which the distance between the several cities—enclosed, perhaps, within a common wall, though each itself

separately fortified—readily allowed. The population of the whole area was, for this reason, smaller than might have been expected, amounting, probably, to less than a million, which, however, was a vast number for a city in ancient times.

After his wonderful preservation, Jonah had no longer the waywardness to attempt flight from the presence of God, strange to us as such a thought in any case is; but, having a second time been ordered to go to Nineveh, “arose, and went, according to the word of the Lord.” It was a strange mission; for the people of the great city could have no idea such as the Jew entertained of Jehovah, but must have shared the belief, common to all antiquity, that each local god had only local power, and could not interfere in the territory of another divinity. It appears, however, from the most recent studies, that as early, at least, as the ninth century before Christ, Jehovah was a name recognised and worshipped over Western Asia, far beyond Jewish bounds, as it is frequently found incorporated in Assyrian proper names, and also in those of other nations. Jonah would not, therefore, be proclaiming a strange god when he entered the gates of the Assyrian capital.

Orientalists are still impressed, more or less readily, by the appearance of “holy men,” such as their own dervishes, whose enthusiasm in some cases, where high sincerity inspires them, is much like that which marks a true prophet in all ages. The name “dervish,” Dr. Wolff tells us, means “one who hangs at the gate of God” awaiting his inspiration; and the ecstasy of some of the class may be compared to that of which we read, for example, in Micah, who, we are told, went about

“stripped and naked, and howled like the jackals, and roared like the ostrich.” I do not suppose that Jonah bore himself thus, but the fact that such appearances as those of Micah, were familiar over all Asia, must have opened the way for his influence in Nineveh. We may suppose him showing himself in such a garb as that of Elijah, or others of the prophets,—his hair streaming down his shoulders; his outer dress a rude sheepskin mantle. He may have arrived in the disastrous time after the death of Shalmaneser II., when the nations conquered by that great monarch, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean, were, in most cases, in rebellion, and troubles oppressed the Nineveh palaces. Wandering over the open spaces, with their mansions and huts, and through the lanes and bazaars of each part of the city, he terrified the crowd by a piercing, monotonous wail, in a dialect which, though intelligible in a short sentence on the Tigris, must have sounded barbarous and uncouth,—“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” His appearance proclaimed him “a holy man,” and he might have been sent, in these dark times, by the gods.

No community needed repentance more. Its splendour was the plunder of nations. Its pride and cruelty were proverbial. Its very religion was a consecration of impurity. Day by day, as the prophet stalked through the streets, his terrifying words struck home to the popular conscience, and the alarm soon spread from the highway to the palace. The strange weird apparition and the cry, were told to the Great King in his sculptured halls, and he was only a man, like the humblest of his subjects. To him, also, the incident came like a voice

from the gods, and his superstitious, guilty soul was afraid. Humiliation, alone, he knew, could bring favour from above. Laying aside his gorgeously embroidered robes, and putting on coarse sacking, he prostrated himself before the Unseen, throwing ashes on his head, to show his sorrow and contrition. A solemn fast, moreover, was appointed, during which neither man nor beast should eat or drink. The people were also required to wear sackcloth, and even the beasts were to be wrapped in it, while all the population were to "cry mightily to God, and turn from their evil way, and from the violence that was in their hands." How long this fit of penitence lasted is not told us; but the history of Nineveh, after Jonah's day, shows that its better mood could not have continued very long.

HOSEA.

IF the warnings, remonstrances, exhortations, and entreaties of faithful preachers of righteousness could have reformed the northern kingdom, it would have repented of its evil ways and saved itself. Among these, Hosea, a native of North Israel, takes the foremost place. Appearing toward the close of the reign of Jeroboam II., when the afterglow of prosperity under that monarch was beginning to fade away, he continued for sixty years to plead with his countrymen to cease to do evil and learn to do well. The wild confusion into which all things passed at Jeroboam's death, and the deepening wickedness of high and low, bore on the state, hopelessly, to its ruin. Civil wars, stained with cruel massacres, especially those of the two pretenders who rose in Gilead, Shallum, and Menahem;¹ the darkening idolatry associated with the worship at Beth-aven—a place near Bethel—and of the high places of Gilgal, Shechem, and Gilead;² the aggravation of internal disputes from the introduction of Assyria and Egypt, by the opposite factions, as allies in their feuds,³—combined to precipitate the ruin of the land, and throw a dark light on the words of the prophet.

Would that preachers in our own day showed his intense

¹ 2 Kings xv. 10, 13, 14, 16 ff.

² Hos. iv. 15; vi. 8; vii. 7; x. 5, 15; xii. 11; xiii. 1, &c.

³ Hos. v. 7; vii. 16; viii. 9; x. 6; xi. 5; xii. 1.

sympathy with their fellows, and were as brave and earnest in their exposure of the evils that are corrupting morality, social, commercial, and political! He agonises over the decay of righteousness, and speaks with flaming indignation against the sins of the day, not in safe generalities, but in pointed and direct indictments, never losing confidence, amidst all, in the mighty love with which the Eternal watches for signs of penitence, that He may once more shine forth on man and bless him. Were such a preacher as Hosea to appear in each of our towns or cities, it may be that the desolating flood of indifference, ungodliness, money worship, and vice, might be stayed. Absolutely unselfish self-sacrifice, for the love of God and man, made the prophet thus nobly faithful; and the same brave and godly devotion would make men of his mould, now as then.

The tenth chapter is the first part of one of Hosea's addresses on the one subject common to all his other discourses,—the corruption of his country and its imminent punishment. Let me give it, with sufficient expansion to make it more easily understood. "Israel," he cries, speaking, we may suppose, to some crowd in Samaria, "Israel, under Jeroboam II., had grown to be a luxuriant vine, hanging rich with fruit; but the more its fruit, and the greater its prosperity, the more its altars to false gods increased; the richer the land, the richer its stately idols. The heart of the people is divided between them and Jehovah; and they will, for this, be dealt with as guilty. God Himself will break down their altars and destroy their images. Then they will say, 'We have now no longer a king, since King Hosea has been taken from us, because we did not fear Jehovah; and *He* is not our king,

but our enemy. What can He help us?" But why, asks the preacher, has God forsaken them? "I will tell you," says he. "It is because your rulers talk empty words, and swear false oaths, and make treaties to pay tribute, never intending to keep them, as Menahem did with Assyria;¹ and for conduct like this, just punishment is even now preparing, like the springing up of hemlock in the furrows of your fields. And what will the vengeance be? Let me tell you. Ye inhabitants of Samaria have trusted in the heifer-image of Beth-aven,—'the house of vanity.' You will lament for its loss, and its black-robed priests will tremble for grief and fear; for this, their glory, will be carried away as spoil by the foe. It will be carried off to Assyria, as a gift to the great Sargon.² Shame will cover Ephraim, and Israel will blush for the counsel it followed, in bringing in Assyria and then defying it. As for Samaria, her king has passed away like a chip upon a stream. The high places of Beth-aven will be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle will come up over their altars. In that day men will cry to the mountains, 'Cover us!' and to the hills, 'Fall on us!'

"O Israel! thou hast sinned as much as Gibeah, from the days of its great transgression;³ but you have escaped hitherto: the battle of the tribes against the Benjamite children of iniquity did not overtake you, though you were, even then, as guilty. When it is My will," says Jehovah, "I shall chastise you, and the peoples shall be

¹ 2 Kings xvi. 7; xvii. 3.

² "Jareb," here and in Hosea v. 13, is thought to be a secret name for Sargon, as "Pul" is for Tiglath-pileser. The prophecy, if this be correct, will belong to the interval of two and a half years between the capture of King Hosea by Shalmaneser, and the taking of Samaria by Sargon. Hosea x. 3, 7, 15, seems to corroborate this idea. Jareb means "Warlike King."

³ Judg. xix.; Amos ix. 8.

gathered against you, when you shall be bound, as captives, because of your two transgressions,—your two idol calves of Bethel and Dan. Ephraim, victorious, under Jeroboam, over the nations round, has been like a heifer well trained for the threshing-floor, that takes pleasure in treading out the corn. But I will now lay a yoke on her fair neck; I will make her do slavish field work; Judah shall have to plough; Jacob-Israel, to break the clods. If you wish to see better days, sow for yourselves righteousness, and you will, then, reap mercy. Break up your fallow ground, your hard and barren soul, and sow it thus; for it is surely time for you to seek Jehovah, that He may come to teach you righteousness. Till now, you have ploughed in the seed of wickedness, and have, as your harvest, reaped iniquity, and eaten the fruit of your lying unworthiness. Because you have trusted in your chariots, and in the multitude of your mighty men of war, the shout of war shall rise against your tribes, and all your strongholds shall be destroyed,—as when Shalmaneser sacked Beth-arbel, in the day of battle; when the mother was dashed from the walls after her children. Such things will your great wickedness at Bethel bring upon you; suddenly, as when one wakes in the breaking of the morning, the king of Israel shall utterly be cut off.”

Shalmaneser IV. of Assyria (727–722 B.C.) invaded Palestine on his accession, in consequence of the omission of King Hosea of Samaria to pay the tribute due from Israel; and the storming of Beth-arbel may well have happened during this campaign. But there had been also, in the prophet's day, a King Shalman of Moab, tributary to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria; and he may

have been the assailant of the unfortunate town. It is quite possible, however, that Shalman is a contraction for Shalmaneser.

Such preaching as this tenth chapter of Hosea, or, indeed, as that of the prophets generally, is surely much needed in our own time; for how much better is London or New York, in many respects, than Samaria?

"THE DRUNKARDS OF EPHRAIM."

DURING the reign of Hezekiah, some time in the years immediately preceding the campaign of Shalmaneser against the northern kingdom, which ended in the fall of Samaria into the hands of his successor, Sargon, B.C. 722, the vices of the capital of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, or "Ephraim," drew from Isaiah of Jerusalem the striking protest contained in the twenty-eighth chapter of the prophecies bearing his name.

"Woe," cries the prophet (to Samaria), "to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, (woe to) the fading flower, his, (Ephraim's), glorious adornment, which is on the head of the fat valley of them that are overcome (or, 'smitten down') by wine!"¹ Samaria stood on an isolated green hill, rising from the bosom of a rich plain surrounded by hills equally green, but with rounded tops higher than that of the height on which the city stood. Apparently secure on its well-fortified hill, it was to the northern kingdom, or Ephraim, like the garland on the head of one feasting,—the company at a carousal being always crowned with wreaths. In the deepening corruption which was bringing on its ruin, "Ephraim" had given itself up, more and more, to

¹ The Hebrew word translated "overcome" is used in Judg. v. 26 of Jael smiting Sisera's temples with the hammer and nail. The other texts in which it occurs are worth examining. They are: Judg. v. 22; Prov. xxiii. 35; Isa. xvi. 8; 1 Sam. xiv. 16; Ps. lxxiv. 6; cxli. 5; Isa. xli. 7.

reckless dissipation and profligacy ; Samaria, the capital, especially, exhibiting this demoralisation, so that, as the head and glory of the nation, it might fitly be associated with the general intemperance, too prevalent throughout the community as a whole. But, as in the case of other states in history, this triumph of strong drink was to be the ruin of the land. Weakened and made helpless by it, the kingdom would be trodden under foot by the Assyrian. Samaria would be to this terrible enemy as tempting as the first ripe fig to the passer-by who sees it, and as instantly and easily devoured.

In the fifth verse, the people of the southern kingdom are addressed. In the day of "Ephraim's" trouble, Jehovah of hosts would be a glorious crown and fair diadem—the highest and most glorious, the jewel of the state—to Judah, which is thus promised permanence. Jehovah is its strong defence, which Samaria was not to Israel. For He will give an upright mind to the judges sitting on their tribunal at the gates, and strength to the fighting men, whose it was, to drive back the enemy to the gate of the town, from which he has issued to attack them. Yet they also, like "Ephraim," need strong reform ; for they stagger through wine, and reel through strong drink. Their leaders, who should be their example, are indeed as bad as any, rivalling the drunkards of "Ephraim" in their excesses. Not a few even of the priests and the prophets were a disgrace in this respect ; for "they stagger through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine ; they are drunk even when at their duties." "Prophets stagger while announcing their visions : priests reel as they give forth their oracles and legal judgments,"—though the Law forbids their touching

wine when on duty.¹ The very tables at which they sit and drink, witness against them; for they are disgusting with drunken vomit: they are covered with it."

As was natural, such men resented words so keenly honest and searching. "Whom," said they, in affected innocence, "would he (the prophet) thus teach knowledge, and whom would he make to understand what he pretends to speak from God? Are we babes just weaned from the milk, and taken from the breasts? For he gives us command on command; rule upon rule; a word here, a word there." But Isaiah has his answer ready: "Yes, it shall be as you say. The same thing over and over; God will still speak to this people; but as they mock Him with their drunken stammering repetition of His words to them, He will speak to them with still worse,—with the stammering words and foreign tongue of the Assyrians. Hitherto He has told them their wise course,—the true rest to the weary land, and its refreshment; but they would not hear. Henceforth His word to them will, indeed, be as they say, command on command; rule upon rule; a word here and a word there; but it will no longer save this people, but bring their merited punishment on them; for they will not hear, but will keep on in their chosen evil ways; the end being, that they will fall, and be ruined, and led away captive."

Palestine was, in antiquity, famous for its vines and wine. There are ten different names in the Old Testament for the vine, and twelve for wine, and at least ninety texts in which drunkenness and drinking are mentioned. Since the Mahommedan conquest, however, the growth of the vine, except for syrup or grapes, has

¹ Lev. x. 9; Ezek. xlv. 21.

ceased, no one drinking wine but Christians or Jews, so that the vine is cultivated chiefly at Hebron in the south, and Lebanon in the north, by men of these two religions. I never saw a drunken person in the East, but neither, so far as I remember, have I seen one in Italy, the country of the vine, in our times; whereas, in England, drunkenness is a national disgrace and curse. Each year the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland drinks about a hundred and forty million pounds' worth of beer and other intoxicating liquors.

Thank God, the moral cancer is not so deeply rooted or far spread, as it had become in Israel, before its fall; but the fact that the prosperity of the country, through the conquests and strong rule of Jeroboam II., led to this decay in Israel, is full of significance. Goldsmith says:

" Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay ;"

and it is impossible that there should not be a great decline among nations who waste such vast amounts on what leaves no equivalent, while it transfers to the pockets of a few what would have made a multitude happy. Thank God, there is not, in England, such ground for indictment of the religious teachers as Isaiah makes against the "priests and prophets" of Judah. Morality is higher among us in this particular, though there have been times, when even Christian teachers have been far below the standard of to-day, as regards temperance.

To me, however, it seems a very poor thing that a public servant of Christ, in whatever section of the Church, should content himself with the negative virtue

of keeping from excess. He deserves no credit for it. Apart from principle, he cannot afford to be intemperate. Public opinion would insist on his retirement, and that would mean social and pecuniary ruin. But is this enough? Is he to content himself with moderate indulgence, in any form, in that which, year by year, brings ruin on multitudes of those for whom his Master died? In my parish in Norwich I found that about every third house was desolated by drink. Men were imbruted, ay, and women as well, in too many cases; children were half fed; misery in every shape was let loose.

The heart bleeds for the sufferings this vice brings on the community, not to speak of the neglect of religion it involves; neglect so utter, that the public-houses have practically stamped out Christianity in some parishes. Even in the waste of capital it occasions, drinking is terrible in its results. A fine woman, who was working at a loom in her wretched house, told me,—in answer to my inquiry why she, a wife with a family, needed to toil in this way, when she had a husband earning good wages,—that, out of a guinea and a half which he got in the week, he gave her only eight or nine shillings. An iron-puddler in Northumberland told me he earned four pounds a week, but had nothing by Tuesday night. It all went, he said, in treating the men who were for the time in the public-house; his fuddled brain being unable to realise what he was doing, till the enforced sobriety of an empty pocket restored his senses. A very popular English politician has justly said, that drink causes more evil than war, pestilence, and famine together.

One reminiscence of the tragedies drink creates, may

close this paper. In a rude outpost of civilisation in Canada, I was once summoned to bury a young man who had died of drinking, in a wretched "grog-shop." There was nothing by which to discover his name or English address ; but he evidently was a gentleman. No burial-place had, as yet, been set apart in the neighbourhood, and the question of finding a spot in which to lay him, was only solved by a farmer offering a grave in his orchard. There, among the fruit-trees, I read the service over the poor fellow ; but, as no one could tell who he was, or whence he came, I was not able to write to his friends, to let them know his end. Some tender mother, it may be, or broken-hearted father, far away, was wondering what had become of the boy who once promised so fairly ; but they could never learn anything of his fate. He had simply vanished out of life,—one more victim of the drinkseller.

AMOS.

THE Hebrew prophets were drawn from all classes of society. Isaiah of Jerusalem belonged to the higher, Amos to the humbler, ranks of the people. Part of the year he tended flocks on the uplands round Tekoa, just below Bethlehem, in Judea; another part of it, he was earning a poor living by cutting open the coarse figs of the sycamore, used by the lowly as food; puncture of the rough fruit being needed, to let out a bitter juice, and thus make it eatable. He was, in fact, only a hard-working peasant, with no advantages of professional training; modestly owning that he was neither a prophet nor a 'son' of the prophets.¹

The northern kingdom, in the days of Amos, was sinking ever lower in the tone of its public and private life,—largely, we may imagine, from the corrupting influences, on an irreligious community, of the great prosperity enjoyed under the able and victorious reign of Jeroboam II. Samaria was filled with the spoils of war and the profits of a wide commerce. The humble dwellings of sun-dried brick, which had contented men hitherto, were replaced largely by houses of hewn stone; and in not a few mansions, the walls of the finer chambers were covered with a plating of thin ivory, brought from Africa by the Phœnicians; couches and furniture of this costly material

¹ Amos i. 1; vii. 14, 15.

being also more or less common. Nor was a single house enough for the wealthy; they must have one for the cold, and another for the hot, season, amidst pleasant vineyards, on the slopes of the round hills.¹

But, as wealth accumulated, the state sank. The heathenism around men affected general morality; nor had the Baal-worship of the time of Ahab been without its abiding influence on the community. Town and country were, alike, filled with those who had fought under Jeroboam II., and, in doing so, had learned the morals of the camp. The poor grew daily poorer, the rich more wealthy. Drunkenness and debauchery spread apace.² "The drunkards of Ephraim" became a phrase as far off as Jerusalem. Even the priest and the prophet, as we have seen, went to their ministrations stupid through strong drink, and guests drank to an offensive excess at table.³ The very women were given to their cups.⁴ Greed for money, to support this sensual indulgence, went to fearful lengths. Judges, duly bribed, gave honest men into slavery for so small a debt as the price of a pair of sandals.⁵ Instead of giving back, in the evening, as the Law required, the upper garment, in which the poor man lay down at night to sleep, but which he had been forced, through want, to pledge, the usurer kept it, to spread on his own couch, at his carousals in the house of his god, where he and his like feasted on the flesh of their sacrifices, washed down with wine got by extortion or violence.⁶ In their rich mansions, maintained by the oppression of their poor neighbours, men lay, garlanded and anointed,

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 39; Amos iii. 11, 15.

² Hos. iv. 11.

³ Isa. xxviii. 1, 6, 7.

⁴ Amos iv. 1. Hitzig.

⁵ Amos ii. 6. Schmoller, Hitzig.

⁶ Exod. xxii. 25, 26; Amos. ii. 8. Hitzig.

on couches of ivory, at their feasts, while music murmured through the hall, and wine, no longer mixed with equal parts of water, as had been the custom of old times, was dispensed from huge jars.

Such splendour could only be maintained by wrongdoing. The toiling peasant had to give up a large part of his grain, while those who had to buy, were cheated by false weights and measures, and fleeced by shameful prices even for refuse wheat. Men had to pledge their clothes, and even their freedom, for a bit of bread.¹ No wonder that, in such a state of things, the prophets could say, that no truth, or mercy, or knowledge of God, was left in the land, and that swearing, lying, homicide, stealing, adultery, housebreaking, and frequent murders, were rife.

The roads were unsafe; robbers went about in bands, and even the higher classes and the priests were parties to the worst crimes.²

Amos made his first public appearance two years before the great earthquake in Uzziah's reign, when Jeroboam II. had been on the throne fifteen years, in Samaria. Living south of Jerusalem, he felt divinely impelled to go to Bethel, the headquarters of the corrupt worship of the northern kingdom, to witness against the sins of Israel.

There was, indeed, much to assail, even in religious matters. The temple at Bethel boasted a high-priest, with numerous clergy, much better endowed than the priests of Judea; and the king, who worshipped at Bethel when there, had a palace in its neighbourhood.³ Samaria and Gilgal had set up local calf images of their own.⁴ A

¹ Amos ii. 6-8; v. 11; vi. 4-6; viii. 4-6.

² Hos. iv. 1, 2; v. 1, 2; vi. 9.

³ Amos vii. 13.

⁴ Amos iv. 4; v. 5; vii. 13; viii. 14; Hos. viii. 5; x. 5; xii. 11.

temple to Asherah, which had remained from Jezebel's day in Samaria, was reopened.¹ Silver and gold images of Baal were set up.² The impurities of heathenism once more reigned.³

It was natural, therefore, that Amos should denounce such varied evils, if, by any means, he might rouse the people to repentance and a better life. His prophecy opens with denunciations of the sins of the communities around,—Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab,—and dark hints are thrown out, of the punishment in store for them, for their wickedness, if they continued in it. The way was thus cleared, for his applying the same rule of God's government to his own people. Judah, having once and again offended, would, assuredly, not escape, if she did not change her course. Having thus indicted his own kingdom, he was able to turn to Israel, and address its people in the same strain. The whole prophecy is, henceforward, a continuous reproof of the offences of the northern kingdom.

¹ 2 Kings xiii. 6; Hos. ii. 13.

² Hos. ii. 8.

³ Hos. iv. 13-15; ix. 15; xii. 11; Amos iv. 4.

THE MESSAGE OF AMOS.

WHEN Amos was delivering his stern message to the northern kingdom, it was in the height of prosperity, for its king, Jeroboam II.,¹ had spread its bounds, as you will remember, from the far north, at Hamath, on the Orontes, in Cœle-Syria, to the south end of the Dead Sea, reigning triumphantly over this great territory, which stretched out both east and west of the Jordan valley.² To outward appearance, Israel had entered on the full summer of its fortune, with no hints of any but a splendid future. Was not wealth abundant? Was not the government strong and wisely administered? To speak of approaching ruin and disaster was like threatening a storm under a cloudless sky. To keener eyes, however, the specks which told of decay within, were visible on the fair surface. The righteousness that gives strength to a nation was wanting. Selfish luxury, unprincipled greed, lawless and unbridled immorality, marked all classes. Might was right, to the strong. The priests were drunken and worthless. The rich were equally dissipated. The judges took bribes; and, in business affairs, to overreach a neighbour, or to force him to a bad bargain, was as it should be. The religion of a people may always be exactly tested by their commercial morality. When honesty and truth are wanting between man and man, the most flaming

¹ Amos vii. 10.

² 2 Kings xiv. 25, 28.

profession of orthodoxy is only the white outside of a moral sepulchre.

Among the few who looked thoughtfully at things around them, and saw all this prevailing in the rich, prosperous, northern kingdom, was Amos—"the burden-bearer"—who had come to Bethel, from his lowly calling on the pastoral uplands of Judah, to deliver his soul respecting it. With a grand bravery he had even gone to Bethel itself, when Jeroboam was in his palace there, and had not only denounced the calf worship and the moral shortcomings of the community, but had told the crowds of worshippers, who would be sure to spread his words through the whole kingdom, that Jehovah was wroth with it for its sins, and would make desolate its high places on the hill-tops, where it worshipped, and lay waste its temples of Bethel, Gilgal, Samaria, and Dan; nay, more,—that he would rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword, and that the king himself would die by violence, while, as to Israel, it would surely be led away captive out of its own land.¹

Such daring fidelity reminds one of that of the dervish who told the Sultan, to his face, that the country was sunk in wickedness, and that, as in fish, the corruption began at the head. Both dervish and prophet, however, remained unmolested; for, in the East, a man who speaks with what is believed or feared to be a Divine commission, is too sacred a person to be touched even by kings. Like other ambassadors, the representative of the most high God is inviolable, except when a gust of popular fury overpowers this reverence for a moment. Amaziah, the high priest of Bethel, could bear the denunciation of the

¹ Amos vii. 9-11.

country, but hastened to report to Jeroboam the treason of Amos against himself, though the only result was a contemptuous order, through the priest, that the offender should take himself off to Judah again, whence he came, and get his living, and prophesy there. He must leave Bethel; for it was the national sanctuary and the king's temple.

Amos, however, was not to be silenced. Fifty years were to pass, after the death of Jeroboam, before the cup of iniquity of the northern kingdom was full; but he saw it, through that long vista, brimmed at last, and held to the lips of Samaria, to drain to the last dregs. "I was sent," replied he, "O Amaziah, to Israel, not Judah. Nor did I dream of coming till thus driven to do so by God; for I am neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but only a herdman, and a cutter of sycamore figs. Thus sent, I must speak." And so, once more, he broke out with his gloomy denunciations and warnings. "You try to silence me," said he to the high functionary, who thus sneeringly ordered him off—"I tell you what your fate will be. Your wife will be a harlot in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword, and your estates will be divided among foreigners sent to occupy the country, and you yourself will die in a heathen land, and your bones will lie, unburied, on unholy earth, and Israel shall surely go forth into captivity." He then continued, addressing the crowd: "The Lord God showed me a basket of summer fruit, which you call 'kaitz.' And He said, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A basket of kaitz.' Then said Jehovah to me, 'The "ketz"—that is, the end—is come upon my people Israel. I will not again forgive them any more. And the songs of the

palace¹ will be turned into howlings for the dead in that day, saith the Lord God; for the dead will lie thick in every place. Men will cast out their bodies, to lie, unburied, in the silent desolation that will reign. Hear this, oh! ye who hunt down the needy, to eat them up! You can scarcely wait till the high days, such as the new moons, are over, on which there is no buying, to sell your corn, or for the Sabbath to pass, that you may bring out your wheat from your granaries to sell it; and to rob the poor, you make your measure small, and put a heavy price on the grain; while, to crown all, you use false weights. Thus you buy the poor, as slaves, for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, making him a slave for the smallest debt. Yes, the very tailings of your wheat, which men throw out, you sell dearly. Jehovah has sworn, by the glory of Israel, that He will surely never forget any of your works, thus vile. The land will certainly tremble for this, and all its population will mourn. As the Nile-flood rises and then sinks again, so shall a flood of Divine indignation swell up over your land, rising awfully, and sinking again, when you are swept away. That day shall be one of darkness and lamentation. It will be like the gloom of the great earthquake, in the days of Uzziah. Your feasts will be turned into mourning, and your songs into lamentation; and you will clothe yourselves in sack-cloth, in your agonising sorrow, hoping, by penitence, to turn away God's judgments, but hoping in vain; and you will shave your heads as in the greatest calamities, and the mourning over the land will be like that for an only son, and it will end as a bitter day. You despise my message now, but, in those days, I will send a famine of my word

¹ Amos vi. 5.

on the land. You will then no more hear it, though you were to wander after it over the whole country. Misery will burst upon the nation. The fair virgins and the strong young men, so well nourished till then, will faint for thirst; and those who swear by the calf of Samaria, and say, "As thy god liveth, O Dan," and by the joys of the pilgrimage to "Beersheba," shall fall and never rise up again.'"

FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

NATIONS sink only slowly to their fall, and always from internal corruption, rather than violence from without. The word "religion" means "to bind fast," or "to bind back," to bind fast to right, and back from wrong; and all history vindicates the deep truth of its claim to do both, for nations as well as individuals. Without principle, men are wolves, preying on each other; their lower nature riots in sensuality and all vicious indulgence, till the community they form sinks, under moral exhaustion, decay, and corruption. It was so in Israel. It was founded on violence, when firm but peaceful determination would have secured the reforms for which it revolted; it made religion a political plaything, and even accepted from its kings whatever heathenism they chose to introduce. Might, from the first, was right; steady development was precluded by repeated revolutions; ill-gotten wealth debauched the rich, and aided them in plundering the weaker and poorer, till, at last, after the strong hand of Jeroboam II. was removed, things passed into a weltering chaos of internal strife between the factions of rival pretenders.

King Zechariah followed Jeroboam, to perish within a year; Shallum succeeded, to be overthrown and murdered in a month. Then came Menahem, a man of Gad, from

the other side of the Jordan, a mere adventurer, who seems to have managed to keep his position for nine years. Next rose Pekahiah, his son, to be murdered, after two years, by Pekah, the captain of his body-guard, who maintained himself through twenty more years of violence, lawlessness, and war.

Finally, after his murder, came the last king of Samaria, Hoshea, the creature of Tiglath-pileser II. of Assyria, to fill the throne for the nine years before the final catastrophe. Plotting with the Egyptian king, So, to shake off the yoke of the Assyrian monarch, Shalmaneser IV., he drew on his country an invasion from Nineveh, during which he was taken prisoner and carried off. Samaria was besieged and taken, after Shalmaneser's death, by Sargon; the kingdom blotted out; governors from Nineveh set over the land; its people deported to the regions of the Tigris, and bodies of heathen immigrants transplanted, from their various conquered homes, to take the place of the Hebrews swept into exile. Their future countries were various, some being settled in Halah, apparently somewhere in the region of Haran, where Abraham had lived; others, in the wild mountains of the country of the Medes, east of the Tigris; and still others, elsewhere. To replace them, bodies of settlers were brought to the vacant districts of Israel, from Babylon, from Cuthah, a town of Babylonia, where, in keeping with the Scripture narrative, a temple of Nergal has been found; from Ava, a Babylonian, or, possibly, a Syrian town; from Hamath, on the Orontes; and from Sepharvaim, in Babylonia.

It must not be supposed, however, that the wide bounds of the northern kingdom were depopulated; for Sargon

tells us, in his annals, that the number of prisoners he carried off was only 27,280. It would seem, therefore, that he led away, at least at the capture of Samaria, only those actively compromised against him; the unfortunate city being, in fact, treated much as Jerusalem was hereafter to be, by Nebuchadnezzar, in the reign of Jehoiachin. Parts of the country would undoubtedly be left unpeopled by the ravages of war, so terrible in those ages; but the common people must have been left behind in great numbers, if only to pay tribute to Assyria, since it could not have been raised from a desert, while the foreign settlers would need years, before they were able to contribute to the revenue.

It would seem, however, that successive colonies of foreigners were sent to the northern kingdom, at intervals; for Sargon tells us that, at one time, he sent to it people from Arabia Petraea, and other regions of which the very names are now unknown, and, at another, that he sent still other bands from six different parts, respecting one of which, "the land of Bari," he says, that "even the learned have not hitherto known of it." A passage in Ezra, moreover, seems to imply that there was a still further colonising of portions of Israel, at a much later time; probably in consequence of some attempted revolt. It took place in the time of Esarhaddon, who reigned from B.C. 681 to B.C. 669; his son Asnappar, or Assurbanipal, settling a number of Elamites, some from Susa, in the northern kingdom, with additional bands from Babylon and Erech.¹ We may assume that each of these transplantations of foreigners to the old territory of Israel, implies a corresponding deportation of Hebrew prisoners

¹ Ezra iv. 2-10.

to Assyrian provinces in the East during at least fifty or sixty years, leaving the Hebrew population still remaining in Northern Palestine, to become more and more of mixed blood, from intermarriage with the successive bodies of immigrants, who, though heathen, were, for the most part, of the same Semitic race as the Jews, and therefore easily mingled with them.

The foreign elements thus introduced into the country gave an overwhelming preponderance to idolatry, when added to the influence of Phœnicia, whose people were settled on every part of the land where trade could be pursued, and whose own nation was the wealthiest and most powerful in the Levant. The northern Hebrews, always lax, as a whole, in their fidelity to the old religion of their race, as shown in their worship of the calves, and their wide apostasy to Baal and Ashtoreth worship, under Ahab and his successors, no doubt would succumb, to a large extent, to the new influences which surrounded them. The men of Cuthah, the great necropolis city of Chaldea, would make them familiar with the worship of Nergal, "the lion god," their local idol. Those from Hamath worshipped Ashima, possibly, though not probably, the Phœnician goat-headed god Esmun. The Avites bowed down to the dog-headed god Nibhaz and to Tartak, apparently an embodiment of the principle of evil. The men of "the two Sipparas"—in Hebrew, *Sepharvaim*—boasted of their town being the "city of sun worship," and, in keeping with the awful rites of some forms of this idolatry, burned their children alive to Adrammelech, or Adar-Malik, "Adar is king," who, elsewhere, is called Chiun and Moloch,¹ and bore, among his titles, that of "the

¹ Amos v. 26.

lord of fire," represented under the form of a bull with wings and a human head. With this idol they joined Anammelech, "Anu is king," a figure of a man dressed in a fish-skin to his waist, over inner robes, and hence called, among other names, "the fish god," to whom also their children were offered by fire; apparently a reminiscence of Oannes, the half divine being who had come over the sea to the Euphrates, and had civilised its nations. The men of Babylonia, again, paid homage to Succoth Benoth, or "Sakkut-binutu," a name for Merodach, the planet Mercury, as the "chief ruler of the universe."

No wonder, therefore, if the knowledge of Jehovah died out so grievously, that the poor wild creatures sent to the northern kingdom, finding it slow work to reduce the wilderness made by war, to its former cultivation, and suffering under the consequent increase of wild beasts, petitioned the King of Assyria to send them priests, who might teach them the worship of Jehovah, since, as the rightful local God, in their opinion, He only would be able to protect them.

Of the portion of the ten tribes carried away to the East, history says nothing, but it is very striking to notice that the population of Galilee, at a later time, was so purely Jewish as to be accepted as brethren, even by the rigidly narrow people of Judah. It would seem as if, from time to time, especially after the destruction of Nineveh, in B.C. 609, the best of the ten tribes, faithful, among the faithless, to the God of their fathers, had made their way back to the Galilean hills, and thus unconsciously fulfilled the prophecy that their tribes would indeed return to the land of Israel. In the case of Judah,

similar prophecies were regarded as fulfilled when a very small proportion of the Babylonian exiles returned to Jerusalem; and it seems only fitting that we should apply the same rules to the return of so large a number of the northern tribes.

RETROSPECT OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM.

THERE is still a little band of lepers "outside the gate" at Samaria; that is, outside the village, for there are no gates now, though the remains of at least one still show the bounds of the ancient city at that particular spot. The hill on which the old capital stood rises about four hundred feet above the undulating green plain, five or six miles across, in the middle of which it rises; but there is nothing left of its early splendour, though some relics of its greatness under Herod are still to be seen. The population have so poor a reputation that my tent had to be protected by a watchman through the night, to guard it from thieves or robbers. As to the past, they know nothing; for I sat on the ground a long time, talking with a number of the chief men about the history of their town, and they listened with all the curiosity that greets a story never before heard.

It has seen strange and terrible times. Shortly after its being built by Omri, it seems to have been besieged by Ben-hadad I., with the result of his securing a quarter in it for his people, settled there as traders. Under Ahab, Ben-hadad II. besieged it; and it was a third time besieged under Joram, by Ben-hadad III.; the citizens holding out through the agonies of an awful famine, from which the retreat of the Syrians, panic-struck by imaginary dangers, delivered them. It is now 2614 years

since it was stormed by the Assyrians, under Sargon, after a three years' investment; the northern kingdom ending with its fall.

Beyond the good in his name, which means "Jehovah is he," I can see very little in Jehu. His service to the national faith was, beyond question, due to his ambition as much as to his principles; and it was effected through treason, deceit, and the most heartless bloodthirstiness. If it were necessary to murder his king and Jezebel, what reason but the Eastern policy of exterminating all possible rivals, could justify his massacre of Ahab's family; while, as to his slaughter of the defenceless multitude of worshippers of Baal, whom his hypocrisy tempted to their doom,—it was a very poor way to advance the interests of religion. The prophet Hosea, indeed, nearly a century and a half later, shows how deep the horror at his cruelty had sunk into the national mind; for he introduces Jehovah as declaring that He "will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu."¹

The people of Nineveh were, no doubt, familiar with "holy men" very much like the Hebrew prophets, and thus would be open to impression from the solemn words of Jonah, as he paced through their streets in the sheep-skin cloak and the rude dress of his order. "The prophets," says Dr. Wolff, "were dervishes in dress, style, and actions. They strip and go naked, like Isaiah and Micah; they sit at the gate, are consulted by kings, wrap themselves in their mantles in deep contemplation, and, like Elijah, will answer, 'I am filled with zeal for God;' or, 'I think of the time when the Restorer of all things will come, when the wolf and the lamb will lie down together.'" It is

¹ Hos. i. 4.

thus easy to realise the effect of Jonah on a superstitious Oriental population.

The mound left by the huge mass of the ancient walls of Nineveh runs in a rude parallelogram, or rather trapezoid, with its front touching the banks of the Tigris at the two ends, but it does not enclose a space "of three days' journey" across, which must be intended by the words, "Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey." Khorsabad to the north, and Nimroud, the ancient Calah, to the south, though associated with Nineveh, were not, so far as can be seen, joined to it by any fortifications; but the wide space between these points, and behind Nineveh proper, may have been covered with houses, built amidst gardens, fields, vineyards, and open spaces, giving ample breadth for the three days' slow advance of the prophet.

An eminent traveller lately returned from Asia informs me that the city of Teheran is no less than twenty-four miles across, and that Erzeroum is twenty-two miles in breadth; vegetable gardens, open spaces for the camels lying down, and other intervals without houses, taking up quite a large share of these wide limits. It is thus easy to think how Nineveh could be three days' journey across.

The notice, by Amos, of the rains being withheld, is not unfrequently illustrated in Palestine. In 1888 the surface of the Lake of Tiberias was five feet lower in April than it had been in February, from the failure of the "latter rains." The Jordan, as it flows out of the lake, was only knee-deep, where in March there had been a depth of six and a half feet. The springs throughout Galilee, and especially in the district of Tiberias, ran very low, many drying up altogether, so that the large town of

Lûbieh, and the town of Nimrin, were forced to get their water supply, from the previous September, at the powerful spring of Hattîn, four miles from the one, and two from the other. At Nazareth, the want of drinking-water was severely felt, and not a drop was left for the irrigation of the gardens. Foreigners, who were not fortunate enough to have friends, found nobody to water their animals, even for money. This helps us to realise the terror of the prospect held out to the northern kingdom, by the prophet.

The general corruption of the richer class in Israel, denounced by the preachers of the day, of whom Hosea and Amos were only two, out of we know not how great a number, was the inevitable result of the accumulation of wealth in a few hands, in a limited and poor territory; but the shameless want of heart displayed, could only have been possible in a very disorganised community. To make bread so dear that men sold themselves as slaves to get it, is a height of wickedness recorded against the moneyed class both of Israel and Judea; for, in the time of Nehemiah, the usurers of Jerusalem enslaved the humbler citizens by the same infamous system of extortion.

Political instability was the tap-root of the misfortunes of the northern kingdom. Revolution followed revolution, each marked by social convulsions, and each bringing forward new swarms of needy adventurers, under whom the land was, at last, utterly exhausted. Such a state of affairs would not, however, have been possible, had the population been less sunken than they were; and that they were so degraded as to go after Baal, and multiply altars, was assuredly, in great measure, the fault of priest and prophet, who should have taught the masses higher ideals

and more self-respect. It is no wonder, therefore, that, while the true prophets denounce the rich and the violent, they no less condemn the priest and the prophet, who had fallen from their high estate, as true and diligent ministers of righteousness and instructors of the nation.

The captivity of the northern tribes knew no formal and corporate "return" like that of Judah from Babylon; but it appears certain that the population of Galilee, which, in the strictest Jewish times, was recognised as of true Hebrew blood, consisted, originally, of members of the Ten Tribes, who made their way back to the green hills of Northern Palestine, perhaps after the downfall of Nineveh, about B.C. 609.

The religious decay in Judah under the usurper Athaliah, must have been very grave, to lead to such selfish inertness in repairing the Temple buildings, when the young Joash and the High Priest Jehoiada intrusted its repair to the priests and Levites. The Church was evidently as much tainted by the spirit of the age as the laity. It is striking, indeed, to notice how continually we find, in the history of the Jewish states of Judah and Israel, the need of some strong personality to rouse them from social, political, or religious degeneracy. Prophets, priests, and people seem, alike, to have been low in tone, as a rule, with illustrious exceptions; for the faithful men whose testimony we still have, are very pronounced in their denunciation of the bulk of all classes in their day.

ATHALIAH.

As the marriage of Charles I. to Henrietta Maria of France brought untold trouble on England, that of Omri's son, Ahab, to Jezebel, of Tyre, was disastrous in the extreme to the Hebrew race. It seemed a grand match, since it brought Israel into close relations with the richest state of Palestine; but the introduction of Phœnician idolatry into the northern kingdom, to please the new queen, was a ruinous price to pay for material advantages. Worse still, Jehoshaphat of Judah, personally true-hearted to Jehovah, was weak enough, for policy, to arrange a marriage of his son and destined successor, Jehoram, with Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel,—a woman as unscrupulous, ambitious, and fanatically devoted to the Tyrian worship, as her mother had shown herself. Clever, resolute, and remorselessly energetic in carrying out her aims, she dominated Jehoram's weaker nature, as Jezebel had lorded it over that of Ahab. It was at her instigation, we may suppose, that the reign of her husband was inaugurated by the massacre of his brothers, or half-brothers, and a number of other unfortunates, supposed to favour them. David had been anything but merciful to the house of Saul, Solomon had the blood of Adonijah and Joab on his hands, though, indeed, they had only followed imperfectly the practice of the kings round, and Abimelech, the first pretender to the throne of Israel,

killed all the sons of Gideon to secure his position ; while Jehu was, before long, to carry out the same cruel rule, by a wholesale massacre of the princes of both Israel and Judah. It had, in fact, for ages, been the custom in Oriental monarchies, and it has continued to be so till our own day in some of them.

The throne thus established, though each step was wet with blood, Athaliah, following the example of her mother, proceeded to introduce the gods of her beloved Tyre, into Judah ; Jehoram remaining, like Ahab, in the same circumstances, weakly passive. High places to Baal and Ashtoreth rose in the towns,¹ and heathenism threatened to cover the land, though, as yet, the worship of Jehovah was condescendingly permitted in the Temple. So weak a reign, however, showed its results in many ways. Edom, subject to Judah, revolted, and won its independence, after Jehoram had been nearly cut off in attempting to subdue it. The Philistines won back Libnah and Gath, and, in alliance with Arabs from the south, invaded Judah, carrying off many of the people as slaves, and much plunder, besides capturing all the royal family and the royal harem ; one only of David's blood escaping, —Jehoahaz, afterwards known as Ahaziah.² No wonder that, when Jehoram died, his body was refused admission to the royal tombs.

Ahaziah, on mounting the throne, found himself king only in name ; for Athaliah, his mother, practically usurped all power. A temple to Baal was raised by her in, or near, Jerusalem, in part from the stones of Solomon's Temple, which had been more or less broken

¹ 2 Chron. xxi. 1-11.

² 2 Kings viii. 20-22 ; 2 Chron. xxi. 8-10.

down to obtain them;¹ and it had its altars, images, and staff of priests and helpers, under a high priest called Mattan. The idolatry of Tyre, patronised by the crown, became the fashion with the upper classes of Judah, and the people were not slow to imitate them.

Ahaziah and no fewer than forty-two of the huge royal family having, however, been slain by Jehu, Athaliah found herself still more free than before to play the queen. Her son was only twenty-three when he was murdered, and had reigned only a year, so that she had not waited long. But she too must, as she thought, anticipate opposition, by rooting out all the surviving members of the royal family. Ahaziah's children were too young to reign, they could be killed off, and prevented from ever becoming old enough, and there were many rich branches of the house. All, alike, were massacred, by Athaliah's orders, except one baby about two months old, the future Jehoshaphat, whom the infant's aunt, a daughter of Jehoram, hurried, with its nurse, into the secrecy of the priests' chambers in the Temple, where he was safely guarded and cared for. To this one feeble life the race of David had been brought down.

Meanwhile, Athaliah reigned unopposed, devoting herself to the spread of her adored idol worship, and contemptuously leaving the dilapidated Temple in the hands of the still surviving adherents of the old faith. In the seventh year of her usurpation, however, a revolution which would destroy her, and restore the line of David, seemed possible, and Jehoiada, the High Priest, resolved to venture on it. The preparations, carried out with the greatest secrecy, were fortunately successful, and the

¹ 2 Chron. xxiv. 4, 7.

young Jehoash was brought before the people, who hailed him as king, while Athaliah was deservedly put to death, forthwith. The restoration of Jehovah-worship followed at once. The temple of Baal was demolished, and its altars and images destroyed; Mattan, the high priest, being cut down, apparently, while sacrificing;¹ but there was no further bloodshed. The courses of priests and Levites were reorganised, as arranged by David,² and the Temple services re-established; but public feeling hindered the removal of the high-places, which were everywhere revered as sacred to Jehovah.

The half-ruinous condition of the Temple could not be tolerated under the altered aspect of things, and it was, therefore, enjoined on the priests and Levites, by Jehoiada, that they should collect, yearly, in all the cities of Judah, the tax imposed by Moses, of half-a-shekel a head, for the holy place,³ and use this for the restoration of the sanctuary. The selfishness of human nature, however, made the scheme a failure. The priests had vested interests in the money, and in the amounts given in payment of vows, or as free gifts, which, also, Jehoiada had ordered to be devoted to repairing the sacred house.⁴ A policy of masterly inaction left the sacred building still broken down, after twenty-three years.⁵

Another arrangement had, therefore, to be made. The matter was taken entirely out of the hands of the greedy priesthood, to whom their own revenues were much more than the honour of Jehovah. Instead of their handling the money, it was kept by Jehoiada in his own control,

¹ 2 Kings xi. 18.

² 2 Chron. xxiii. 18.

³ 2 Chron. xxiv. 6-9; Exod. xxx. 12-14, 16; Num. i. 50; Acts vii. 44.

⁴ 2 Kings xii. 4.

⁵ 2 Kings xii. 6.

the king's scribe being appointed to check all receipts and payments, and a chest being provided, with a slit in it, for the coin to enter, that all gifts and other incomes might be collected in it. The priests were left nothing but the "trespass" and "sin" money.¹ A proclamation, moreover, was issued, requiring all to pay the Temple tax, which had not been collected in many cases; and this resulted, now that things were on a sound footing, in the people bringing the amounts due, to Jerusalem. Honest overseers paid the workmen directly; vigour was thrown into the task, and the restoration was at last rapidly accomplished. Other measures were taken to provide funds for the various requirements of public worship, and before long the sanctuary was once more as it had been in the better days of the past.

¹ 2 Kings xii. 16; Num. v. 8; xviii. 8, 9.

HEZEKIAH.

HEZEKIAH, the son of a weak and idolatrous father and of a princess called Abijah, "Jehovah is my father," was a striking contrast to Ahaz, and, it may be, was indebted, more or less, to his mother, for his better characteristics; if her principles and life were in keeping with her significant name. Nothing could be more trying than the condition of Judah, when Hezekiah ascended the throne, on his father's death, as a young man of twenty-five. Ahaz, from the opening of his reign, had acted, like a silly child,¹ on the impulse of the hour, without religious earnestness or national dignity. Under his evil guidance only the shadow of his father's glory was, ere long, left to the kingdom, in the haughty luxury of the few rich, the introduction of foreign manners, and, with them, of heathen superstition and apostasy.² The valour of Uzziah's day vanished, the proud position of the state was lost; and it was even invaded and laid waste by the allied kings of Israel and Syria; Jerusalem itself being besieged by them, and a great multitude of the country people carried off and sold as slaves in Damascus.³

In vain did Isaiah exhort Ahaz to vigorous resistance and trust in Jehovah,⁴ comparing his foes to smoking

¹ Isa. iii. 12.

² 2 Kings xvi. 5; 2 Chron. xxviii. 5.

² Isa. ii. 6.

⁴ Isa. vii. 4, 7, 16.

firebrands, presently to be quenched. His words were given to the winds, and the ominous course was taken, by the terrified king, of invoking help from Assyria, to which he sent the silver and gold of the Temple and the treasuries, to bribe support.¹ He was thus saved any more anxiety from Israel or Damascus, but at the heavy price of becoming, henceforth, a vassal of Nineveh,—a calamity of which Isaiah loudly predicted the fatal results.² From this moment the state began to sink still more deeply. Edom and the Philistines rose successfully against it, and tore from it its outlying possessions.³ Still worse, idolatry grew rife under the patronage of the king, who “sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree,”⁴ giving himself up to Baal worship, and even to that of the horrible Moloch, to whom he actually offered one of his own sons.⁵ Nor was the Temple itself sacred from his desecration, for in the place where the brazen altar had stood, he raised one copied from an altar he had seen in Damascus, when paying homage there to Tiglath-pileser.⁶

One hope still remained, however, to Judah, thus degraded and decaying, in the moral influence of some noble men, whose souls, filled with loyalty to truth and right, as identified with the faith of their fathers, braved the king, and kept alive a spirit in the community, which promised a better future. Among these were Isaiah and Micah, and to them we may ascribe much of the good found in the character of the heir-apparent, Hezekiah.

¹ 2 Kings xvi. 7-9.

³ 2 Kings xvi. 6; 2 Chron. xxviii. 17, 18.

⁵ 2 Kings xvi. 3; 2 Chron. xxviii. 2, 3.

² Isa. vii. 17; viii. 7.

⁴ 2 Kings xvi. 4.

⁶ 2 Kings xvi. 10-16.

The dawn of the new reign showed how radical was the difference between Ahaz and his son. Under the counsel of Isaiah, the young king showed himself more and more decided in his restoration of the old religion and the suppression of idolatry, so that the fond recollections of an after-age spoke of him, in the words used also of Josiah, as one "after whom was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."¹ As early as the first day of the new year after his accession he showed his enthusiasm for the worship of Jehovah. By his orders the long closed doors of the Temple were once more opened and "strengthened," apparently by plates of gold on the old woodwork.² The priests and Levites were also brought into the open space on the east side, before the Temple,—that is, the inner forecourt,—and required to sanctify themselves, that they might set about cleansing the Temple, and fitting it again for public worship, which they could not do till they were levitically "clean." Everything "unclean" was required to be removed from the sacred chambers, and from the Temple courts.

"Our fathers," said the king,—that is, Ahaz and his generation,—“had trespassed, and done evil in the eyes of Jehovah, and had forsaken Him, and turned their backs to the holy house, and their faces to other gods, and had shut up the entrance doors of the sanctuary, and thus put out the ever-burning lamps, which no one could approach to trim and keep burning, and also stopped the incense-offering on the golden altar, while burnt-offerings could not be presented, since the great altar had been taken away by Ahaz, and a Syrian altar,

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 5 ; xxiii. 25.

² 2 Kings xviii. 16.

consecrated to Syrian idols, had been put in its place. On account of this unfaithfulness and sin, the wrath of Jehovah had burned against Judah and Jerusalem, as all could see with their own eyes, in the wars there had been with the Syrians, the northern kingdom, the Philistines, and the Edomites, and, not less, in the oppression under which they lay from Assyria. For lo! our fathers fell," continued he, "in one day, before the sword of Pekah, to the number of a hundred and twenty thousand, all valiant men; and two hundred thousand men, women, and children were carried off, with much spoil, by Israel, though afterwards sent home again, which, however, was not the good fortune of the great multitude carried off as slaves to Damascus."¹ He had it in his mind, said the young king, to make a covenant with Jehovah, to serve Him in Judah, and Him only, that His fierce wrath might be turned from them. The assembled priests and Levites must throw themselves heartily into the sacred work; for God had chosen them to the great honour of standing before Him, to serve Him, and minister to Him, and burn incense.

This exhortation roused the multitude to such earnestness that in sixteen days they had finished their task, having cleansed all the house of the Lord, which meant the whole sanctuary, embracing the courts and enclosed grounds, and the altar of burnt offering, after putting it again in its place, and all its "vessels," and the shewbread table, and all connected with it. All the vessels, moreover, which Ahaz had cast away, had been cleansed,

¹ 2 Chron. xxviii. 5-8.

and made as they ought to be, and were now before the great altar. Everything that had defiled the sacred bounds had, in these busy days, been carried down to the Kedron by the Levites, and thus got rid of.

The story of Hezekiah's reign as a whole cannot be told in one sketch; but it was marked throughout by beautiful faithfulness to Jehovah, though not without two notable instances of weakness, when he yielded to the Egyptian party in Jerusalem and defied Assyria, in spite of the counsel of Isaiah, and when he showed his treasures to the envoys of the Babylonian king, Merodach Baladan. Yet he never turned aside from his fidelity to God. The reconsecration of the Temple was made the occasion of a great public act of worship, vast numbers of priests and Levites officiating, great sacrifices being offered, and an immense multitude gathering to take part in the services.

At a subsequent time, apparently later than the fall of Samaria, which took place six years after Hezekiah's accession, a great Passover festival was celebrated, to which all were invited, from Dan to Beersheba, the remnant of the northern kingdom being thus included. A vigorous effort, moreover, was made to purify the country from the idolatry that had prevailed. Even the brazen serpent of the wilderness was broken up, from its having become an object of superstitious reverence. Everywhere, the sun pillars of Baal were broken in pieces; the Asherahs, or emblems of the female counterpart of Baal, were cut down; the high places—that is, the sacred places built on hills—and the altars in all the land, were “utterly destroyed.” A centralisation of worship, which greatly added to the importance of

Jerusalem and the dignity of the Temple, was thus, in a measure, secured; but the reign of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was to show that external reformatations avail little, unless accompanied with a corresponding revolution in public morality and sentiment.

ISAIAH OF JERUSALEM.

IN the section of Isaiah, extending from chapters xxiv. to xxvii. inclusive, the Holy Land, with its capital, are represented as lying wasted and sad, in their desolation, their inhabitants plundered and mostly scattered, the small remnant still left, given up to lamentation, instead of enjoying their former happiness.¹ Part of the community, which has escaped to the distant coasts of the Great Sea, raise, thence, thanks and praise to Jehovah; but the prophet, who has been left among the foe, laments his sad case.² His evil treatment fills him with indignation, and rouses a hope that God will execute stern judgments on the enemy and their gods.³

Meanwhile, in anticipation of this, he praises Jehovah, who will take vengeance on the tyrants, and destroy for ever their city. Nor will those who crush this fearful power be behind himself in honouring God.⁴ To all those who thus render Him grateful homage, Jehovah, throned again on Zion, as its mighty defender, will grant abiding prosperity, keeping all evil far from them, and taking away their reproach, by destroying all their enemies around, and, among others, the Moabites.⁵ Judah will then raise its song of joy, and praise the faithful God, who has, in His righteousness, smitten the

¹ Isa. xxiv. 1-13.

² Isa. xxiv. 14-16.

³ Isa. xxiv. 17-23.

⁴ Isa. xxv. 1-5.

⁵ Isa. xxv. 6-12.

foe, and blesses His people, who trust in Him and cry to Him, restoring them again, and securing them permanent safety and happiness.¹

Yet the land, after such terrible oppression, lies in an evil plight, and many of the people, swept away as captives, have died in exile. Would that they might rise again! But this misery will shortly be over, for Jehovah will soon come forth and destroy the huge leviathan that desolates the earth.² Thenceforward He will protect His vineyard, and His people will enjoy rich prosperity;³ for He chastised it only to purge it from its iniquity,⁴ and when this has brought it to penitence, He will gather again, to it, all His poor exiles, and unite the whole community in a flourishing and righteous State.⁵

The primary reference of these chapters appears to be to the condition of Judah, when temporary ruin had just been brought on it by a terrible invasion;⁶ but it is hard to fix a period, exactly, as that intended by the prophet, for he rises above mere historical application, and turns his allusions to national experience, into emblems of the far distant Messianic future.

In the opening of the twenty-sixth chapter, Moab has just been trodden down as straw is trodden and torn to pieces for *teben*, or fodder, on the threshing-floors of Madmenah, a Moabitish town, famous for its mound of refuse,—the dust-heap of the community,—at its entrance; from which it got its name.⁷ Jehovah would smite Moab,

¹ Isa. xxvi. 1-16.

² Isa. xxvi. 17 to xxvii. 1.

³ Isa. xxvii. 2-6.

⁴ Isa. xxvii. 7-11.

⁵ Isa. xxvii. 12, 13.

⁶ Isa. xxiv. 7-12; Jer. xliii. 5 ff.; xlv. 22.

⁷ There are no manure-heaps or dung-hills in the East, and no "pools" flowing from their juices. The Authorised Version and the Revised Version are both wrong in this verse (Isa. xxv. 10).

hand over hand, in a shower of blows, as an Oriental smites the water when he swims,—for he does not spread out his hands as we do, but beats his way on,—and would utterly lay them low, dismantling their fortresses, however high or strong, and levelling them with the ground.

But while it will be thus with Moab, its enemy,¹ Judah will sing a triumph over the possession of the now impregnable city, Jerusalem; for its outer and inner walls will be not merely stone ramparts, but the protecting might of Jehovah. In the time of the Messiah no walls, indeed, would be needed; the “salvation” of God would be the defence of Zion. “They will call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise;”² for “Jehovah will Himself be to her a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her.”³

In the second verse, the citizens are called upon by a multitude of returned exiles, delivered from their far-off tyrants, and changed, by the softening influence of their troubles, to a worthy life of fidelity to Jehovah.⁴ “Open ye,” they cry, “the gates;”—for the city has gates, though “salvation” is its walls and bulwarks,—an incidental proof that the expression is only figurative, and that, even in the Messianic times, real walls and bulwarks were still imagined—“Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth truth (towards Jehovah) may enter in.” Delitzsch fancies this call is from heaven, and that they who are to open are angels. The ground of God’s tender bearing towards them is, that, through their sufferings, they have learned to put

¹ Isa. xxvi. 11.

² Isa. lx. 18.

³ Zech. ii. 5.

⁴ Jer. xxiv. 7; xxix. 12; Ezek. vi. 9.

their confidence in Him, and to hold fast to Him henceforth. "Him who is of steadfast mind" (in his faith in Thee) "Thou wilt keep in peace,"—protected from all evil,—(Thou wilt thus keep him in peace) "because he trusteth in Thee" (instead of trusting in idols, or in any earthly help).

The population echo this in a wide refrain, as to a triumphal chant: "Trust ye (O people) in Jehovah for ever: for in Jah Jehovah ye have an everlasting rock;" that is, Jehovah will evermore protect and keep safe His people, as the high, virgin fortress, never overcome, guards and makes safe those within it. Against this high-towering, impregnable rock, all who would harm them can do nothing. He has shown this, beyond challenge, by the way in which, in these very times, He has brought down the pride of them that dwelt on high,—those of the lofty city,—the capital of Moab, with its high, fortified castle, and great walls¹ He laid low, even to the ground; brought it even to the dust. The foot trod it under,—the feet of the wretched exiles, the footsteps of the lowly. Like Moab, Babylon, itself, the tyrant, had been made to bow before the conqueror; and the feet of the exiles, once oppressed and down-trodden in it, had trampled on the ruins of the palaces of their haughty taskmasters, as they hastened out of it, once more free, towards Jerusalem.

Yet Jehovah grants not only triumph to His people over their oppressors, but prosperity, now that, through suffering, they have been led back to Him in heart. "The path of the righteous man"—that is, of the faithful servant of Jehovah—"is straight and even," so that he

¹ Isa. xxv. 12.

will neither stumble nor fall as he goes : "Thou levellest and makest to an even way the path of the righteous." Similarly, in Proverbs¹ we read, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall make smooth thy paths;" and,² "The righteousness of the perfect"—that is, of him who perfectly trusts in Jehovah—"makes his way smooth and level; but the wicked falls by his own wickedness." The figure is a poetical mode of promising prosperity, just as calamity is represented by a rough, broken path.³

The people of God have waited and longed for the breaking forth of His judgments against their tyrants; feeling assured that, in the end, He would enter on the path of the righteous judge, and execute deserved judgment on their adversaries. The longing of their soul had been that He would reveal Himself as the Mighty One and the Just, which is His name and memorial. In the dark days of trouble and exile,—in the night when one turns to thought and to prayer, "I longed after thee," says the voice of a single speaker,—perhaps the prophet himself. "Yea, with my spirit within me have I longed for thee earnestly," that Thou wouldst appear as the avenging Judge. "For when Thy judgments are in the earth, descending on it from Thee in heaven, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness," and are thus brought to a better frame.

But, on the other hand, let the godless be treated with long-suffering favour and forbearance, he will not learn righteousness, but continues his tyrannical wrong-doing. Such had been the experience of Judah with its oppressors.

¹ Prov. iii. 6.

² Prov. xi. 5.

³ Lam. iii. 9; Job xxx. 13.

After conquering many nations, the Chaldæan would invade even its sacred bounds, and deal wrongfully in a land where justice and righteousness should always have reigned, a land that was holy,—and would take no heed to the fact that Judah belonged to the most high God, and that He dwelt in it. To lay waste other lands was natural, though unjust; but not to spare even Jehovah's land, showed the uttermost wickedness: made possible only by the long-suffering patience of its God.

THE GREAT HOPE.

THE beautiful verses in which Isaiah paints the glories of the Jewish race in the distant future¹ have in every age been referred, both by Jews and Christians, to the "Anointed of God"—the Messiah and the kingdom He should establish; indeed, it would almost seem as if they had been known beyond the bounds of the Hebrew race, and had aided Virgil in the picture of the Golden Age, which he imagines, in the delicate flattery of a poet, as destined to follow the birth of a son of the Consul Asinius Pollio.²

It is interesting to study the precise connection in which this famous passage is introduced by the prophet, and its primary application in his hands. The section in which it occurs begins with the fifth verse of the tenth chapter, and continues to the sixth verse of the twelfth; opening with a reference to Assyria, as commissioned by God to punish Israel for its sins, but, in the pride of its military glory, proposing to go beyond the Divine purposes, and "destroy and cut off nations not a few," and "do to Jerusalem and her idols" as he had done to "Samaria and her idols."³ This, however, he will not be allowed to carry out; for Jehovah will bring to nothing the Assyrian army, when it has invaded Judah and fulfilled the design of God in the chastisement of the

¹ Isa. xi. 6-9.

² *Eclog.* iv. 5.
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³ Isa. x. 5-15.

people, and their penitent return to a better moral state.¹

Judah need not, therefore, despair, though the Great King come against her. The Assyrian will, indeed, come up towards Jerusalem from the north, and press it close, but, while seeking to crush it, will himself be destroyed by Jehovah. Though the foe "shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem," the Lord will come forth against him, even the Lord of hosts, and smite his forest-like army,—lopping the bough with terror, and hewing down the high ones of stature, and humbling the mighty, and cutting down the thickets of the forest with iron, and felling his Lebanon to the ground.² "The Lord shall send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day. And He shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and it shall be as when a sick man pineth away. And the remnant of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them."³

The invasion of Judah thus anticipated, seems to have been one of the two which we know the great Assyrian king Sargon to have made, after he had taken Samaria in B.C. 712. Two years later he was again in Palestine, to crush an alliance of the local kings with Egypt, his rival; routing the forces of the Pharaoh at Raphia, and fiercely stamping out the rebellion, from Hamath on the Orontes to Gaza in the far south. But a fresh alliance against his

¹ Isa. x. 16-23.

² Vers. 24-34.

³ Vers. 16-19.

supremacy recalled him, in B.C. 711, after the ambassadors from Merodach Baladan had visited Hezekiah, in the hope of forming an alliance with him and the other local princes against Sargon, his mighty foe; and it is to this invasion, apparently, that the prophet refers, though the destruction of the Assyrian army at this time has not come down to us. But while destruction awaited the enemy of the people of God, that people was itself destined to rise from its humiliation, and to attain wondrous glory under a prince of the line of David. It was no more than the stump of a fallen tree, in contrast to the glory as of a Lebanon cedar, ascribed to Assyria. It had neither trunk, branches, nor foliage. But while Assyria is to perish utterly, there is life in the root of the humbled house of Jesse, and from the lowest fortunes it will once more rise gloriously. There is hope in this tree, though it has been cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.¹ A shoot will spring from it, which will renew its trunk and branches, and a fresh green sucker will rise from the roots, covered over, as they are, with the soil. This second clause is used by St. Matthew as an explanation of the term "Nazarene," applied to Christ after Joseph had returned to Nazareth; the Hebrew word for "sucker" or "shoot" being Nāzer, which resembles Nazarene in sound. But it will not remain thus feeble; for "it will bear fruit." One day, its glorious crown will hang thick with it.

In the second verse the figure is changed from a tree to a living prince, the Messiah, God's anointed. "There will descend and rest on him the Spirit of Jehovah, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and

might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah.”¹ In mind, in the gifts needed for wise and fruitful action, and in those implied in a lofty spiritual life, he will be abundantly and abidingly blessed, from the supreme fountain of the Divine Spirit. “Wisdom” is the power to see through appearances, to the essence of things; “counsel” is the gift which will enable him to form just resolves, and “might,” that which will secure their being vigorously carried out. The knowledge of Jehovah and “fear” of His majesty are those of loving communion with Him and lowly reverence.

His kingly rule will be moulded by these high endowments. “His delight shall be in the fear of Jehovah,” as the sweetest of odours to him,² “and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.” Reverencing God, he shows his fear of Him in his imitation, toward his subjects, of the absolute and impartial justice of the Eternal,—a matter of supreme moment in an Oriental monarch, who is judge as well as ruler of his people. His decisions as judge will be made, not by what he sees in the suitor,—whether he be high or low, powerful or weak, rich or poor,—nor by what report, or defendant, or accused, or witness, may say, but by that which, as a man fearing God, he sees to be the essential truth. Contrary to what had been the case in the past,³ he will give heed to the cause of the poor and helpless, by incorruptible justice against their oppressors, and with absolute uprightness will decide the case of the meek and humble of the land, who, before his day, had

¹ See Isa. lxi. 1; Matt. iii. 16; John i. 32, 33; iii. 34.

² The Hebrew word is translated, in the forty-nine places in which it occurs, “smell,” “scent,” “savour.”

³ Isa. i. 23; x. 2.

been treated most wrongfully.¹ Moreover, the execution of his righteous decrees shall smite the guilty, as with a rod, over all the land, none escaping their just punishment; for, when his reign is new, there will still be evil doers. "The wicked" will even be sternly put to death by his sentence, "the breath of his lips,"—his reign being thus strongly righteous, because, as one that fears God, righteousness and fidelity to truth are in his character and nature, like the girdle round a man, that binds everything together.

Under such a ruler, Good and Right will come to unchallenged dominion, even hurtful beasts laying aside their malignity and violence. The wolf will lie down beside the lamb, till now proverbially its prey, the leopard with the kid, and the lion with the calves. They will, indeed, form, together, a peaceful flock, which willingly follows a little boy, its shepherd. The flesh-eating animals are no longer to devour any living creatures, but will live, like cattle, on the growth of the soil; the cow and the bear feeding together on the grass of the pastures, their young ones lying down peacefully together, and the lion eating *teben*,—the broken straw of the threshing-floor,—like the ox in the stall. In those days the suckling will be left, without fear, beside the hole of the poisonous asp, that he may play with the snake, then turned harmless; and the weaned child will stretch out his hand to toy with the basilisk as it comes out of its crevice. Asps and vipers will then no longer bite, but will have become kindly and guileless. The basilisk was a specially deadly viper, so that the picture is made very striking by its being mentioned in such a way. The Golden Age will come back

¹ Isa. iii. 15; v. 23.

again, and the old times of paradise be repeated, when innocence reigned alike in the human bosom and the lower creatures, and "every green herb," but nothing beyond, was given to every beast of the earth for food.¹

And as the lower creatures will no longer hurt, so man will cease from injuring his fellow. They will not hurt or destroy one another in all God's holy mountain—Jerusalem, or, possibly, Canaan as a whole;—for now the knowledge of God will be universal among the once blind and foolish multitude, covering the landscape as the waters cover the great bed of the ocean. In those days the shoot from the now broken stem of Jesse will rise high over the land, as a rallying banner to the nations, who will ask respecting it, and flock to it in bands, to be under the "Anointed" King, who reigns in a realm so supremely blessed. Nor will they come empty-handed to him at Jerusalem, but will make the place where he has his peaceful abode a wide glory, by the splendid embassies, with many and glorious gifts, sent to him through the fame of his transcendent wisdom and goodness.

Then also will the Hebrews, scattered through all countries, be allowed by the nations to return to their fatherland, from Mesopotamia, Lower and Upper Egypt, Ethiopia, Elam—beyond the Tigris,—Babylonia, Syria, and the islands and lands of the Mediterranean; for so widely was Israel scattered even in the eighth century before Christ. They shall gather, with the nations, to the banner set up, from the four corners of the earth.

The feud between the northern tribes and Judah will not be revived, but all the tribes will live together, in peace and love. They will, as a united people, pounce,

¹ Gen. i. 30.

eagle-like, on the shoulders of the Philistines towards the west, and spoil them, and also on the peoples to the East, enlarging the bounds of the kingdom by their victories. And, to free the Hebrews on the Nile, Jehovah will make a dry path for them through it, by dividing its waters, and will do the same with the Euphrates, to open a way for those beyond it. Thus there will be a highway from Assyria, for the remnant of His people which remains, such as there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

HEZEKIAH AND ASSYRIA.

THE reign of Hezekiah began in the year B.C. 724 and ended in B.C. 695, while that of Sennacherib of Assyria began in B.C. 705 and closed in B.C. 681. The fourteenth year of the Jewish king would fall, therefore, about B.C. 711-710: five years before that of the Assyrian began; and, thus, it would seem to be an error of the ancient copyists when it is said, in the first verse of the thirty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, that "in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them." It was Sargon, his father, who invaded Judah at that time; the invasion by Sennacherib falling in the years B.C. 702-701. Sargon reigned from B.C. 722,—the year in which he took Samaria, the siege of which had been brought almost to a close by his predecessor, Shalmaneser IV.

The destruction of Samaria must have created great alarm in the court of Egypt, since it destroyed "the balance of power" between the monarchs of the Nile and the Tigris, and removed an important hindrance to the advance of the rulers of Nineveh against the land of the Pharaohs, between which and its great enemy, it had acted as a protecting outpost, so long as it remained in any measure an independent state. The last hope was that Judah and the different petty nationalities of Palestine, might be won by fair words, to ally themselves

with Egypt against Assyria ; and intrigues for this end had been constant, from the time of the destruction of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, till, at last, Ashdod, the Philistine "city," and most of the local kings and chiefs, openly revolted from Sargon, and refused to pay him tribute ; identifying themselves with their closer neighbour, King So ¹—the reigning Pharaoh.

But Sargon soon crushed the confederacy. Sending his commander-in-chief, or "Tartan," against Ashdod, it was presently taken by storm, sacked, and burned, while the victor carried off its population, and settled foreign colonists, from races he had conquered, in their place. Yaman, the king, had fled to Egypt, or, as it is said, Libya ; but, instead of protecting one who had lost all for him, So meanly delivered him to Sargon's general, by whom he was sent to Assyria, "bound, hand and feet, with iron chains." Hanun of Gaza was treated by the conquerors "as a slave," whole districts were depopulated, and terror unbounded paralysed the whole land. Judah, lying close to the Philistine plain, thus scourged, was ere long invaded ; for Sargon boasts that "he subdued the remote land of Judah," though, unfortunately, no details are given. Jerusalem must have yielded to the conditions of the conqueror ; for it was not dismantled or destroyed, but remained like an islet above the flood of invasion. After a time, Sargon retired, and Palestine saw him or his forces no more. In 705, he lay, murdered, on the floor of the grand palace he had built for himself in Nineveh, and Sennacherib, his son, reigned in his stead.

But the death of the great warrior rekindled the hopes

¹ 2 Kings xvii, 4.

of Egypt. Might not the Pharaoh now reconstitute the old alliance with the kings of Palestine, and thus free himself from tribute to Assyria? His intrigues soon set all Western Asia in a flame; and in B.C. 702-701 the Assyrian legions were once more on the march towards the Great Sea; Sennacherib at their head. Sidon felt the first shock; for, after all its promises, Egypt sent it no help. Then came the turn of the chiefs of Arvad and Gebal on the north, and of Ashdod on the south, with Ascalon, Beth-dagon, Joppa, and other places. Ammon, Moab, and Edom, dismayed at their danger, hastened to kiss the feet of the Great King, and renew their yearly tribute. Hezekiah of Jerusalem, alone, withheld his submission, and put his capital in a state of defence, like that with which it had met Sargon's invasion, ten years before. Still worse, he had allowed the Ekronites to send their vassal king in chains to him, for his loyalty to Assyria, and he was a prisoner in Jerusalem, in open insult to Sennacherib.

Meanwhile, Egypt, under Tirhakah, the Pharaoh of a new Ethiopian dynasty which had seized royal power on the Nile, marched an army to the Philistine plain to repel the Assyrians; but it was utterly defeated at Eltekeh near Libnah, in the old territory of Dan, not very far from Jerusalem. No help could be had from that quarter. Ekron next fell; its chief men being impaled in a ghastly circle round the town, and the bulk of the people led off into slavery. Lachish, between Gath and the hill country, was next assailed. But now came the evil hour for Hezekiah. A strong force marched up the passes from the plains, and, forthwith, forty-six of the Jewish towns were stormed, many villages destroyed

and 200,150 captives, "small and great, male and female," led off as slaves, with "horses, mares, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep, beyond counting." Jerusalem, moreover, was closely invested. "I shut him up like a bird, inside Jerusalem," says the Great King, "and constructed siege-towers against him." Encouraged by the words of Isaiah, Hezekiah stoutly refused to yield, either to force or to the threats of the Rabshakeh; that is, the commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army, who opened communications with Hezekiah and his people. Yet Jerusalem hoped that Tirhakah might come, after all.

But resistance was, in the end, found to be vain, and the Jewish king consented to renew his tribute to Sennacherib. The "cities" taken from him were given, we are told, to the kings of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza: the yearly gifts and tributes were increased, and a long, sad train of "workmen, soldiers, and masons" carried thirty talents of gold and eight hundred of silver, with webs of scarlet and other cloths, precious stones, ivory couches, and chairs, skins of buffaloes, and quantities of valuable timber, to the camp at Lachish, whence it was sent on, by the same bearers, to Nineveh. "Daughters of Hezekiah, the male and female inmates of his palace, and slaves of both sexes," also formed part, we are told, of the fearful impost exacted for rebellion. An envoy accompanied the long, mournful procession, to the feet of the Great King at Lachish, and there did homage for Hezekiah. The treasury had been emptied, and the gold still left on the Temple gates and door-posts stripped off, to meet the Assyrian demands.

Something, however, roused Sennacherib's anger once more, while still in the plains, and, before long, the

Assyrians appeared a second time at Jerusalem. Fear of a second attack by Tirhakah forbade any attempt at a renewed siege, but a formal letter from the Assyrian himself might bring Hezekiah to terms, and make him open his gates. The gods of all other cities and countries, said the haughty sultan, had been helpless to protect their worshippers against Assyria,—and who was Jehovah, that He should be more powerful ?

Like the good man he was, Hezekiah, on receiving and reading this ominous “letter,” went forthwith into the Temple with it, and “spread it before the Lord,” as if to show the Eternal what blasphemy was uttered against Him, and thus stir up His indignation to protect His holy city. As the poor king did so, his full heart overflowed in touching words of prayer. “O Jehovah of hosts,” cried he, “the God of Israel, who sittest between the cherubim, Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth ; Thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and hear ; open Thine eyes, and see ; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their lands, and have burnt their gods in the fire : for they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands,—wood and stone. And on this account the Assyrian was able to destroy them. Now, therefore, O Jehovah, our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou alone art the one living God, Jehovah.”

Forthwith came the answer ; for a message from Isaiah announced that God, through him, declared that, notwithstanding all his boasts, the King of Assyria would

not come into Jerusalem, nor shoot an arrow against it, nor advance against the walls under the shelter of linked shields, nor raise a mound against it, on which to set up his engines of war, to overtop the defences, and launch death within them. "By the way that he came," said the prophet, "by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will protect this city as a bird protects its nest, and save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake."

Whence was this deliverance to come? Egypt had proved a broken reed. Jerusalem, though strong in its natural position, was small, and helpless against the overwhelming forces of the supreme power of the age. But there is nothing too hard for God. "The angel of the Lord," we are told, "went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand men," and nothing was left for Sennacherib but a hasty retreat, "with shame of face, to his own land." A tradition of this catastrophe survives in Herodotus; nor is there any question of its historical truth.

The great king lived for twenty years after his flight, but vengeance overtook him, in the end, for his life of violence. Country after country had been laid waste after his return to Nineveh, and in his closing years he had built a great palace there, nearly three times as long as St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and more than twice as deep and broad,—a wonder of magnificence in any age. The walls and gates of the city had also been restored or rebuilt by him, the outer rampart forming a great fortress eight miles in circumference. But a death of violence was common with Assyrian kings.

Among his sons, two thought themselves aggrieved by him, and, having resolved to seize the throne, fell on their father while he was worshipping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, and murdered him. Yet they gained nothing by their parricide, for another son, Esar-haddon, took the field against them, and, after defeating them, mounted the throne.

The destruction of the great host in the Philistine plains appears to have been from a sudden outbreak of pestilence. This is the Jewish tradition, and pestilence is said in the Bible to be the work of an angel.¹

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17.

THE SUFFERING "SERVANT OF GOD."

THE quotations from the later portion of Isaiah by the New Testament writers leave no doubt that they saw in the fifty-third chapter and those connected with it, as their great characteristic, a series of sublime prophecies of the Messiah, which were realised in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Matthew¹ applies the first four verses of the forty-second chapter of Isaiah to Him, repeating them, apparently without strict adherence to the actual text, but following the Greek version of the Seventy more closely than the Hebrew. Paul and Barnabas (Acts xiii. 47), in the same way, apply Isaiah's (xlix. 6) words, respecting the Servant of God being a light of the Gentiles, to Christ, and also the assurance that He would be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. St. Paul² further quotes (xlix. 8) words from Isaiah as an assurance, to those whom he addresses, that the grace of God then offered, through Jesus Christ, was set before them in realisation of the words of the prophet,—the time at which the Apostle was writing being "the accepted time" to which Isaiah refers. In Romans (xv. 21), he again quotes from the Greek version part of Isaiah (lii. 15) as illustrating his having preached the Gospel where Christ had not previously been named.

In the Gospel by St. John³ other words of Isaiah

¹ Matt. xii. 18-21.

² 2 Cor. vi. 2.

³ John xii. 38.

(liii. 1) are quoted in a very striking way. "Though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" And they are also quoted, in the same relation, by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans.¹ In the Gospel by St. Matthew,² part of the fourth verse of Isaiah liii. is quoted, with a more strict correspondence to the Hebrew than that of our Authorised Version, as being illustrated by our Lord casting out devils and healing all that were sick. In 1 Peter moreover (ii. 24, 25), there is a repeated allusion to the language of Isaiah (liii. 5, 6), as fulfilled in the sufferings and death of our Lord.

In Acts (viii. 32), Philip is introduced as reading to the Ethiopian eunuch the seventh and eighth verses from the fifty-third chapter of the great prophet; but, curiously, he again quotes from the Greek translation of the Bible, not from the Hebrew, the Ethiopian having that with him, and doubtless knowing nothing of the original language. Nor does the Evangelist make any remark to him, on the variations in the translation he was reading, from the text of the Hebrew, which was canonical and inspired, while that of the Septuagint was the rendering of it made by uninspired scholars,—a fact which silences for ever any objection such as, that, if we are to learn from Scripture the real will of God, we must go to the original.

In 1 Peter (ii. 22) we have still another introduction of the words of our chapter as referring to our Lord. "He had done no violence," says the prophet, "neither was any deceit in His mouth." "Who did no sin," says

¹ Rom. x. 16.

² Matt. viii. 17.

St. Peter, "neither was guile found in His mouth." The next verse of the Apostle (v. 23), moreover, sounds like an echo of the seventh verse of our chapter. Finally, our Lord is stated, by St. Luke,¹ to have Himself quoted from the twelfth verse of our chapter, and applied it directly to Himself, in these striking words, "But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet: and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword. For I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, And He was reckoned with transgressors: for that which concerneth Me hath fulfilment."

The section to which the fifty-third chapter belongs, commences at the thirteenth verse of the fifty-second. It follows naturally, a'so, upon that which precedes it. In the fiftieth chapter (v. 6) for example, the "Servant of the Lord," is described as giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, while he did not hide his face even from shame and spitting. In one section, the prophet announces that, in proportion to the humiliations to which this "Servant of God" has been in the past subjected, will be his final exaltation and honour. The verses immediately before Isaiah lii. 13 are the final summons to the exiles of Babylon to depart from it, but not by flight nor in haste; for the Lord will go before them, and the God of Israel will be their rereward, in their return to Judea.

Then the prophet continues, "Behold, My servant shall deal wisely (or, prosper) and shall (hence) be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high;" that is, will attain high estimation and great honour. This exaltation will

¹ Luke xxii. 37.

correspond to his previous deep misery. "Like as many were shocked (or, appalled) at him (so marred was he that his visage was unlike that of a man, and his form unlike that of the sons of men,) in the same way he will (now) fill many nations with wonder; kings shall shut their mouths at him, (not only saying no evil of him, as in the past, but keeping silence, in their wondering homage and reverence), for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they perceive."

The revelations made by the prophet have, hitherto, had no acceptance, because men had no adequate conception of the infinite power of God. "Who," he asks, "has believed our words, and to whom has the arm of the Lord (His infinite power) been revealed (from above)? For he (the Servant of Jehovah) grew up like a tender shoot before Him, (that is, before God), and like a sucker from a root in parched ground; he had no form nor comeliness, and we looked, and there was no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and forsaken, (or, rejected) of men, (no one would have relations with him, he was so marred and contemned): a man of sorrows (or, pains) and familiar with sickness (or, grief), and like one before whom men hide their face, (shrinking from the sight of him); one despised, so that we esteemed him not. (Yet he bore all this suffering for the good of his people, and deserved gratitude, not contempt, from them.) Surely he hath borne our sicknesses (griefs), and our pains (sorrows) were laid upon him; yet we regarded him as one stricken, smitten, and laden with suffering by God (for his own sins).

"But it was for our transgressions he was pierced, for

our iniquities he was (thus) bruised, the chastisement of our sins was on him for our peace, by his stripes we are healed. We all, like sheep, had gone astray; we wandered, every one, his own way. Yet Jehovah made the iniquity of us all light upon him. He was evil entreated, yet he humbled himself, and did not open his mouth, (but was) like the sheep that is led to the slaughter bench, and, as a sheep that is dumb before her shearers, he was silent. From prison and from sentence he was hurried away, but who among his generation bethought himself that he was cut off out of the land of the living, that he was stricken, on account of the transgression of My people? They made (him) his grave among the wicked and among the rich, in his death, although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and lay on him grief, (trouble of body): but although he gave his life as an offering for the sin of his people, he will live again, and see his posterity, yea, live long, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

"Looking on all this,—his posterity, his long life, and the favour of God shown him thus; free now, moreover, from the travail of his soul, he will be satisfied with the results of his life and work. By his knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many, (through his wise instruction and guidance, he will lead them to righteousness, and secure their acceptance with God), and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I (Jehovah) give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with evil-doers; yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

JOSIAH.

JOSIAH, the last of the kings of David's line who reflected honour on his pedigree, was the son of Amon,—a name strongly suggesting that his father, Manasseh, a fanatical heathen for most of his life, had called him after the famous Egyptian God of Thebes, though this may be only a fancy, as other "Amons" are found in the Bible.¹ The suspicion is natural, however, for even Manasseh was not a more zealous patron of the foreign idols he had introduced, than his son showed himself. The Egyptian faction in Jerusalem, which sought to break with Assyria and look for help to the Nile, had gained the upper hand, in spite of the great prophet Isaiah, in the later years of Hezekiah, and had retained it during the whole fifty-five years of Manasseh's reign and the two years of that of Amon, who was murdered in his palace at the age of twenty-four.

The zeal of Hezekiah for Jehovah was thus a distant tradition of the past when Josiah came to the throne, in B.C. 640, a child eight years old. His grandfather had been only twelve at his accession, his father twenty-two, and now again a long minority threatened danger to the little state. Manasseh had destroyed, as far as he could, all traces of Hezekiah's reforms, restoring the worship of idols on the high places, introducing

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 26; Neh. vii. 59.

afresh the worship of Baal, Moloch, and Astarte, and extending the Babylonian star worship beyond anything seen before in Judah. Heathen idols filled, not only the outer, but also the inner, forecourt of the Temple, and an Astarte image was set up even in the holy building itself.¹ The counsels of heathen soothsayers and workers in magic, which did not trouble the conscience, were substituted for those of the prophets. Like a cup full to the lip, Jerusalem, as it were, ran over with the blood of Jehovah worshippers, including, apparently, even Isaiah; the persecution continuing until the old religion seemed to have perished. The tribute promised to Assyria having been withheld, the land was twice invaded from Nineveh, and Manasseh himself carried off to Babylon, then under Assyria; but, after a time, he was allowed to return, dying at last in the Holy City; his last years having been spent, more or less, in efforts to undo, in some measure, the evil of his former life.

Unhappily, Amon, his son, instead of carrying out such reforms, let the heathen party have its way again, so that all the abuses of idolatry which had prevailed in the worst times of his father once more flourished. Was it through a growing public resentment, at this return to a system under which the land had been so terribly visited with two invasions by Assyria, that the unfortunate young king was so soon murdered?

Whatever the cause of his father's death, Josiah was wise enough to sympathise with the kindling opposition to foreign gods, who had brought such calamities on the country. Married at the age of thirteen, he was also precociously mature in his mind and decided in his

¹ 2 Kings xxi. 2-7; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3-7.

resolutions. The past told him of the prosperity of kings like Hezekiah, Uzziah, Jehoash, and Jehoshaphat, who had been faithful to Jehovah, and thus pointed out the secret of national well-being.

His first open step toward the restoration of the national faith was necessarily delayed till the eighth year of his reign, when he was in his sixteenth year. He then felt himself able to set about a thorough extirpation of all traces of the idolatry, which had disfigured Jerusalem and the country at large, more or less, since Solomon's time, but especially since the days of Ahaz and Manasseh. The altars and "pillars" of the native or Tyrian Baal and Astarte worship, the temples of the Moabite and Ammonite gods and of Moloch, the altars dedicated to the Babylonian star worship, the cells in the Temple courts, used as homes by the women dedicated to the unchaste service of the various idols, were destroyed, and everything connected with household idolatry or heathen sorcery, swept away as far as possible. The sacred places of the idols were permanently desecrated by strewing on them the ashes of human bones; the tombs of the idol priests being emptied to supply the ghastly "uncleanness."

The restoration of the Temple worship followed, in the eighteenth year of the king's reign (B.C. 623). The Temple had been repaired about a hundred and fifty years before, but the evil times of Manasseh and Amon had left it to fall into partial ruin. The High Priest Hilkiah was therefore solemnly commissioned to take in hand the renovation of the whole structure, where needed; and this he forthwith set about with notable energy. Every part of the sacred buildings and accessories

was duly examined; and, among others, one chamber in which a very momentous discovery rewarded the thoroughness of the operations.

“When they brought out the money,” we are told, “that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses.” What this precious roll contained is not easily determined. That it could have been read through in so short a time as is implied in various passages,¹ seems to preclude the idea that it embraced all the five books of the Pentateuch. It was, however, identical with parts, at least, of the books of Moses; for it had both ritual laws and the great utterance of blessings and curses, found in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy;² the public mind being henceforth so deeply impressed with these, as to show their influence on both the language and the thought of the kingdom, from that time. There are abundant grounds, nevertheless, for rejecting the theory broached in these last years, that it was simply our Deuteronomy, written, then, by no one knows whom, and produced opportunely, as a treasure dating from the time of Moses. The Hebrew of that book abounds in archaisms enough to show that it was no pious fraud contrived for the occasion, but a veritable legacy from the same antiquity as marks the rest of the Pentateuch. Indeed, the arbitrary division of each of the five books into fragments, alleged to be of the most opposite age, makes it impossible to accept the ideas of extreme critics as to any portion.

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 8, 10; xxiii. 2.

² Deut. xxviii. ff.; 2 Kings xxii. 13, 16 ff.; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 24 ff.; xxxv. 6, 12.

Deeply moved by hearing this sacred oracle, Josiah sent it to a prophetess, Huldah, then of high reputation, to ask counsel respecting the bearing of its blessings and curses on the living generation, but got from her very little consolation; the wrath of God, as threatened on disobedience, being declared imminent on Judah and Jerusalem. "Behold," said she, in the name of Jehovah, "God will bring evil on this place and its inhabitants, even all the curses written in the book, because they have forsaken Him." The only mitigation of this terrible prospect, was a declaration that the king himself would be gathered to his fathers, and to his grave, in peace; that is, before the ruin of the country. He was destined to fall in battle, but Judah survived his death for about twenty years, so that he was spared from seeing "all the evil that God would bring on Jerusalem and its inhabitants." Personally, he would perish by a violent death, brought about by himself; but he would pass away ignorant of what was before his people, and thus at peace in his mind, as their king.

Harsh though the announcement of the prophetess proved, Josiah was too sincere in his desire to reform the nation, to be turned from his efforts to do so, by the dark outlook. He was an enthusiast for what we now call Judaism; nor is it too much, to date the rise of that passionate devotion to the Law, in its ritual details, which the exiles brought back from their captivity in Babylon, to the impulse of the godly and exact king. Fourteen years after the finding of the Law he lay dead of a wound received at the battle of Megiddo, which was fought, to keep faith with Assyria, against Egypt, which he hated.

A striking illustration of the thoroughness with which Josiah had removed all traces of idolatry from the land is seen in the entire absence of such stone monuments as dolmens, cromlechs, and the like, connected with heathenism, from the west side of the Jordan, though they abound to the east of it.

JEHOIAKIM.

JEHOAHAZ, the son of Josiah, is a striking illustration of the contrast we occasionally see between parent and child. His father, slain, when scarcely forty, at Megiddo, in the battle he had rashly provoked with Egypt, had left, so far as we know, three sons, of whom the second was chosen by the people as king, under the name of Jehoahaz, on his father's death. He was scarcely seated on his throne, however, when an Egyptian force appeared, and carried him off captive to the Nile, where he died, it is not known how long after. The eldest son, Eliakim, his half-brother, then took his place under the name of Jehoiakim. A worse king never sat on the Jewish throne, and it may well be that his earlier temporary exclusion from it, rose through glimpses of his character having made men afraid of him. That Josiah, the good, should have been his father, seems strange ; but there may have been influences on his mother's side, or in his surroundings, that stimulated the worst parts of his nature till they choked the better.

King at the age of twenty-five, Jehoiakim had to submit to Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt from the first, and pay him a heavy tribute. But this was enough to expose him to the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar, who, in B.C. 604, became Sultan of Babylon, after having joined in the destruction

of Nineveh, which was followed by his routing Necho, soon after, and driving him out of Western Asia.

This took place six years after Jehoiakim's accession, and in these years Jeremiah was unwearied in his efforts to stem the torrent of evil, which the unworthy king had let loose on the nation. Heathenism again flourished, though abolished so recently by Josiah; and, with it, had come all the corruption to which it leads. Impurity, adultery; lawless oppression of the weak,—whether strangers, widows, or orphans,—by the strong; venality in the judges, falsehood, dishonesty, extortion, hard treatment of poor debtors, robbery, murder, Sabbath desecration, and other forms of evil,—were rampant, and gave constant subjects for keen addresses and denunciations from the fearless prophet.

That he should predict the ruin of the state as the inevitable end of such a decay of public morality, enraged the leaders of society only a little less than his brave exposure of their individual wrong-doing. Judah, he cried, would assuredly be carried off to Babylon. Egypt was no true support. Plots were laid for the faithful preacher,¹ which he exposed with a bitterness of indignation that roused his enemies still more against him.² Still further, dashing a water-bottle to the ground before a crowd of citizens, he told them that the nation would be shattered as this clay bottle had been. In the very Temple, which Jerusalem fancied was, in itself, a security that no enemy could take the city it guarded, he repeated similar language, kindling such fury against himself, by his assailing the holy place thus, that he was seized, bastinadoed, and put in the stocks.³ Some time later the

¹ Jer. xviii. 18.

² Jer. xviii. 19-23.

³ Jer. xx. 2.

priests demanded his death for his fearless language, but he defended himself so ably that he escaped.

Meanwhile, Nineveh had fallen, Necho had been defeated, and Nebuchadnezzar, after returning to Babylon to be crowned, was on his march to Palestine. As he drew near, Jerusalem became the centre to which every one who could do so fled for safety, till the population became terribly crowded. If Judah did not yield to the Chaldean, cried Jeremiah, it would perish. But it was useless to urge this any more in mere addresses. He resolved to write out all his warnings on a book-roll, and have them read publicly to the community. They were, accordingly, taken down for him, at his dictation, by his friend Baruch ; but as Jeremiah did not dare to face the people, now so hostile to him, Baruch was asked to recite them to the multitude in the Temple, and at last consented to do so. A fast had been proclaimed in December, B.C. 604, and brought vast crowds to the sanctuary. There the prophet's roll was read, startling and alarming all by its terrible predictions.

The news spread over the city and reached even the king. Perhaps he might at last be aroused, and induced to yield peaceably to Nebuchadnezzar, or even to head a return to the higher public morals of his father's days. But there was nothing in his nature to which to appeal, no healthy trait from which a new life might develop itself. Although the tribute paid to Egypt was an enormous burden on so small a state, he had no consideration for his people, but wrung from them, by military violence, whatever could be extorted, that he might carry out his ambition to play the part of a great king. Under the very shadow of a Chaldean invasion, he lavished expense

in adorning Jerusalem with costly buildings. A great palace, roofed with cedar from Lebanon, lighted by many windows, and set off with vermilion, proclaimed his love of splendour. Nor was this the only great edifice he raised in the city. It added to the guilt of this selfish expenditure that not only was the money involved wrung from his people; free citizens and peasants were required to do all the work by forced and unpaid labour, and were too often worn to death at their tasks. "He built his city with blood," says the prophet, "and his citadel with iniquity."

Defiant in his hatred of all warnings, from whatever source, Jehoiakim shrank from no crime, to silence the faithful witnesses for God. Had he been allowed, he would have put Jeremiah to death; and he actually did behead one prophet, Urijah, who had fled to Egypt, but was brought back; his body, as a last indignity, being cast into the graves of the common people, and not laid in the tombs of the prophets. It was a brave thing to tell such a man, of the roll having been read in the Temple, and of the excitement its contents had caused. The king's counsellors, however, having sent for Baruch, and listened, for themselves, to a repetition of the whole awful series of warnings, determined to bring the matter before Jehoiakim, and to read them to him also. Yet, knowing his ferocious temper, they counselled Baruch to go, forthwith, to Jeremiah, and, with him, seek safety in concealment. This done, they went, with anxious and awed hearts, to the private room of the king, in the warmly built winter chambers, in the inner court of the palace, leaving the roll in the chief secretary's office.

It was cold weather, and a brazier, placed in the centre

of the floor, had been lighted in the king's room. Entering, they found Jehoiakim reclining beside this, and told him of the public reading of the roll, and the commotion it had raised. Any hope of his being moved to seriousness by the incident, however, was at once dissipated. He must hear for himself all that Jeremiah had ventured to say about his policy, or the fate of the city. The roll was brought, and an official began to read it aloud. But a few columns sufficed to rouse the wild and uncontrollable temper of the king. Snatching the book from the hands of the reader, and demanding from his secretary a scribe's knife, he proceeded, in his blind fury, to cut the long roll to pieces, throwing each slip, in succession, on the glowing charcoal, till the whole was burned up. No remonstrance or entreaty could stop him; instead of penitence there was only malignant rage, and orders were at once given, to arrest both Baruch and Jeremiah, who, however, proved to have safely hidden themselves.

The prophet heard the news of this outrage in his retreat, but the destruction of the roll only determined him to write another, with ominous additions. By the help of Baruch this was ere long done, and the written witness against the king stood out once more in its awful completeness. Jeremiah even ventured to send a message from God to the king, telling him that, for his crime in refusing to listen to the Divine voice, and in blasphemously burning the roll, he would have no son to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body would be cast out, to lie unburied, in the heat by day and the frost by night; and, moreover, it would be left dishonoured, like the carcass of an ass, to rot where it fell, or to be eaten by the dogs. Terrified at last, the proud man ultimately yielded, making

submission to Nebuchadnezzar as his vassal, and thus, for a time, was able to retain his throne. Henceforth, however, till the tyrant's death, Jeremiah remained silent, protected from violence by the high officials whom his message had awed.

But the humiliation of forced vassalage to the Chaldean, was more than Jehoiakim could endure. Three years later he revolted, and thus finally brought ruin on himself and his country. The Chaldean armies were still at war with Egypt, and hence within easy distance of Jerusalem. The city was at once forced to open its gates to Nebuchadnezzar, and the king, after he had been put in chains, saved himself from being carried off to Babylon only by renewed and more abject submission. Still heavier conditions than before were exacted; and the city had to endure the sight of its Temple being stripped of the sacred vessels, which were carried off to be hung up in the temples of Babylon. What remained of Jehoiakim's reign was a succession of troubles. In his haughty impotence he would not submit to his position, but was continually busied in plots and turbulence. To check these, local allies of Babylon—the Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites—were let loose against him, and spread misery over the land.

At last, in B.C. 598, the Chaldean once more approached the Holy City, but before he reached it Jehoiakim had perished. How he died is not known, whether in a skirmish with raiders or by assassination. No dirge was raised for him, so fiercely was he hated; and, though he was the son of the loved Josiah, his body, as the prophet had said, was cast out like that of a dead ass, and left, dishonoured, on the ground. It was even said

that on the corpse, as it lay naked before all, the name of the demon, Colnazer, to whom he had sold himself, appeared stamped in Hebrew letters. Finally, however, if we may rely on the Greek text, the poor outcast king was rescued from his culminating disgrace, and laid beside Josiah and Manasseh in the royal tomb.

JEHOIACHIN.

JEHOIACHIN, son of Jehoiakim, succeeded his father on the tottering throne of Jerusalem, in the year B.C. 598 or 597, when he was only eighteen; and he reigned for just about three months, during most of which the Holy City was closely invested by the Chaldeans. Utterly unable to resist their assaults, Jehoiachin generously and bravely resolved to give himself up to them, with all his family, that the Temple, with the city and its inhabitants, might escape ruin. Nor were the nobles and court officials behind him in their voluntary self-sacrifice. Little mercy, however, was shown them; for Nebuchadnezzar, who was now with the besieging army, sent them off, at once, as captives to Babylon, deporting also, with them, the royal harem, the chief men of the city, many priests and prophets, seven thousand fighting men, and all the mechanics skilled in working metal or armour, wood, and stone; at once to weaken Jerusalem and to benefit his own capital. Thirteen thousand men, in all, were carried off from Jerusalem and the country round. The treasury was also emptied, the palace sacked, and the wealth of the Temple seized; but after being thus humbled, the city was spared.

Assuming that it would henceforth be too feeble for disloyalty, the conqueror appointed Mattaniah, third son of Josiah, a young man of twenty-one, uncle of Jehoiachin,

as the new vassal-king, taking the precaution to make him swear by God that he would be faithful to his suzerain, and make no alliance with Egypt. But, young and inexperienced like his four predecessors, Mattaniah, who on his accession changed his name to Zedekiah, became the mere puppet of the Egyptian party, as the kings immediately before him had been. At first, however, things went on peacefully; but Palestine, excited by Egyptian intrigues, was still restless; so that, although he had gone to Babylon, to show his fidelity, soon after his elevation, Zedekiah gradually, on his return, gave way to the Egyptian party in Jerusalem, and in the end compromised himself so gravely, that, towards the close of the ninth year of his reign, in December, B.C. 591, the army of Nebuchadnezzar once more sat down before the Holy City to besiege it.

Since the death of Jehoiakim no open violence had been shown to Jeremiah, who had remained for the most part in Jerusalem, ceaselessly striving to reform the community and to preserve loyalty to Chaldea, which necessarily brought on him the bitter hostility of those who favoured alliance with Egypt. Meanwhile, the condition of the city grew daily worse. Moral corruption and social anarchy were rampant. Idolatry flourished, and the worshippers of Jehovah were few and timid. Politically and morally, everything pointed to imminent disaster. But the tenacious resistance of the citizens delayed for a time the catastrophe. As a whole, they favoured Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar's rival, and felt sure that a force would be sent from the Nile to relieve them. Jeremiah, however, being confident that resistance was vain, continually urged prompt submission to Babylon;

and this not only in public addresses, but to the king himself, in his own palace.

One reform he was able to effect. Many rich citizens had made household slaves of large numbers of their countrymen and countrywomen; but the prophet was able to rouse the king, for the moment, to take action against this enormity, and a formal act of emancipation was wrung from the slaveholders, when the vote of a great assembly of the citizens had condemned them. Soon after this, news came that an Egyptian force, intended to relieve Jerusalem, was marching into Palestine from the south, and the Chaldeans were forced to intermit the siege for a time, to repel the invaders. Jerusalem hoped, and almost believed, that their disappearance was final; but the Egyptians were soon driven back and the siege recommenced. In the interval of fancied deliverance the wildest disorder prevailed; the freed slaves were once more seized, and lawlessness reigned. Still, amidst the wild confusion, the voice of Jeremiah was continually heard, urging his one counsel, that submission should at once be made to Nebuchadnezzar,—advice so unpopular as to make him the object of nearly universal hatred.

While the Chaldeans were gone, and egress from the city was once more possible, Jeremiah had resolved to visit Anathoth, his native village, about four miles north, to obtain his local dues as a priest, and thus secure the means of subsistence when the Chaldeans returned. He had only, however, got to one of the northern gates, opening through the walls, when he was stopped by the officer of the guard, stationed for the moment at it, and found himself charged with the intention of deserting to

the Chaldeans ; the insinuation being implied that he intended to betray to them the dismal condition of affairs in Jerusalem. The hollowness of the accusation was evident ; for Nebuchadnezzar's army was, at the moment, far away, on its march against Pharaoh-Hophra. But the prophet was so intensely unpopular, for his earnest advocacy of submission to the Chaldeans, and his denunciation of Egypt as at once weak and faithless, that the most transparent pretext was eagerly seized to lay hands on him.

“ You are deserting to the Chaldeans,” said the officer. “ It is a lie,” replied Jeremiah, with Oriental bluntness. His denial, however, was useless ; and he was led off to the junta of chief men,—the heads of city clans, who ruled within the walls as an oligarchy, totally ignoring the authority of the weak-minded Zedekiah. As partisans of Egypt, these men were the bitterest enemies of the prophet. A few years before, the same body had protected him ; but his friends apparently had been amongst the citizens deported to Babylon. The present junta had been bitterly assailed by him, and compared to rotten figs, so that his fate was determined beforehand. He was at once to receive forty strokes, save one, of the stick,—a very severe punishment,—and then to be confined in an underground prison, in the house of one of the number, who seems to have been their secretary. It must have been a terrible place, for it is called “ the house of the pit,” and the cells, in one of which he was immured, are called “ vaults.” It seems to have been near the south side of the Temple precincts, not far from the palace, and was, perhaps, one of the many hidden arches by which the surface was raised, at that part, to a level.

The sufferings of the prophet in such a dungeon, amidst cold and neglect, were so intense, that it seemed to him as if he must die under them. How long he remained there is not told, but at last the king, having heard of his confinement, to the great joy of the unhappy prisoner, sent for him. Completely under the power of the junta, Zedekiah had not the courage to set him free, as he might have done by a word. Yet he wished much to discover if Jeremiah had any message from God, that would brighten these dark hours. "Is there any word from the Lord?" asked he, when the prophet had been brought to him, into some private chamber. But, sensitive and retiring as he was by nature, Jeremiah knew no fear of man in discharge of his high office of prophet. Zedekiah had his life or death in his hands; but this did not move him. "There is a message for thee," said he. "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Then, seizing the chance now offered him, he went on: "What have I done wrong against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets who said to you, 'The king of Babylon shall not come against you, or against this land?'" The wide demoralisation of the prophets as a body, at this time; comparable only to that of the clergy in the worst ages of the Church, could not have been better shown than by such language.

But Jeremiah had not ended. Since these unfaithful members of his order had proved their unworthiness, and as his own correctness and integrity had, on the contrary, been proved by the Chaldeans having invested the city, he could at least claim a mitigation of his sufferings. "Hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king,"

said he ; “ let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee. I ask that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.” Such a request could not be refused ; and orders were given to transfer him from his present dungeon to the court of the palace guard, where he was to have a piece of bread a day, out of the bakers’ street, till all the bread in the city was spent. In this comparatively easy detention he remained till the city was taken.

JEREMIAH DURING THE SIEGE.

THE section of Jeremiah extending from the thirtieth to the thirty-third chapters dates from the tenth year of King Zedekiah, when Jerusalem had been long invested by the terrible army of Nebuchadnezzar, and was very near its fall and destruction. The opening verses of chapters xxxii. and xxxiii. settle this point with reference to themselves, and chapters xxx. and xxxi. are so closely connected with them that they seem to have been uttered at or about the same date.

Strange to say, though written from the guard-house beside the king's palace, where the prophet was kept a prisoner, no doubt with all the rough discomfort or even positive suffering regarded, in the East, as good enough for those charged with any offence, these chapters show a bright cheerfulness, in striking contrast to the despondency of the greater part of Jeremiah's prophecies. Yet he was in the midst of all the miseries of a siege. Famine and pestilence were raging in the city; the noise of the battle at the walls, the flight of hostile arrows, the thud of battering-rams;¹ and the flames and smoke and roar of fires kindled by the enemy against the gates, to burn a way through;² the hurtling of great stones through the air from the machines of the

¹ Ezek. iv. 2; xxi. 22.

² Jer. li. 58; Jud. ix. 48, 49.

besiegers;¹ and the crash of roofs, the screams of terror, the groans of the wounded, the outbreak of fire from the ruined houses, and, through and over all, the wild battle-cries of assailants and defenders, might well have deepened his usual depression into despair. On the contrary, however, his tone became more hopeful the deeper the gloom around, as the stars shine out most brightly on the darkest night.

The demoralisation of all classes of the community had, unfortunately, been so extreme in the past, as to have drawn down on each, in turn, the sternest denunciations of the prophet. The kings, who ought to have been shepherds of the people, destroyed and scattered them;² too many of the prophets were unworthy of their calling, and so were too many of the priests. "They walked in lies, and strengthened the hands of evil-doers, so that all the people of Jerusalem had become like those of Sodom and Gomorrah in the eyes of God."³ From the prophets of the capital, pollution had gone out all through the whole land.⁴ Nor were the priests any better.⁵ The citizens carried off to Babylon with King Jehoiachin had been like a basket of June figs, the finest and most prized; the population left behind could only be compared to a basket of figs so bad as to be uneatable.⁶

Still there were a few among them who were faithful to Jehovah, and in them lay the hope of the future. Through them religion would revive, in the land of exile to which they would soon be swept away, and, in spite of the temporary extinction of the state, God

¹ 2 Chron. xxvi. 15.

⁴ Jer. xxiii. 15.

² Jer. xxiii. 1.

⁵ Jer. xxiii. 33.

³ Jer. xxiii. 13, 14.

⁶ Jer. xxiv. 4-10.

would not let His gracious promises to Israel fail, but would "bring back again the captivity" of His people and cause them to return to the land He had given to their fathers, and they would again possess it.¹ Babylon and the other nations that had oppressed them would be terribly punished, and God would declare Himself the God of all the twelve tribes of Israel, who would be led back from all lands by Him, with great joy; for Jehovah felt towards them an unchanging and everlasting love.² Preparations for their return were to be made across the desert.³ Judah and Samaria would alike have a glorious future.⁴

The vision had passed before the prophet in sleep, and now he awoke; but his thoughts presently called up a new picture, of all the tribes living in peace and prosperity, in their own land, as a united people. "Behold, the days come," said the heavenly voice in his soul, "when I (Jehovah) will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah (as if they were a fruitful field), with the seed of man and of cattle. And as I have watched over them, to pluck up and root out, to destroy and consume and afflict, so will I watch over them, to build and to plant, says Jehovah." Like all others, in every age, they had, in their self-righteousness, blamed every one but themselves for their sufferings, flattering their souls that they paid the penalty of the sins of their forefathers, and were themselves victims rather than justly punished.

It was, indeed, an article in their theology that the sins of one generation were visited on another, however

¹ Jer. xxx. 1-3.

³ Jer. xxxi. 21, 22.

² Jer. xxxi. 1-14.

⁴ Jer. xxxi. 23-25.

innocent. Canaan had been cursed for the sin of the son of Noah.¹ The grandsons of Saul had been put to death for the offence of their grandfather, with which they could not possibly have had anything to do.² A psalmist cried out, "Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out."³ Job had said that "God layeth up (the punishment of) the iniquity of the wicked for his children," and Jeremiah himself⁴ calls for Divine retribution on the children of his enemies. But he now presents another side of the truth, as Ezekiel also had done, on the banks of the Chebar, in the same years.⁵ Henceforth there was to be no escape from individual reponsibility, and the son would not bear the sins of the father, if he abstained from his father's sins. This grand doctrine, however, was not accepted by any means generally, even in the days of Christ; for His disciples asked Him whether the blind man himself, in some former state, or his parents, had sinned, that he should have been born blind;⁶ and the crowd, eager to crucify our Lord, cried out, "His blood be on us, and on our children."⁷ But Jeremiah anticipates that, in those days when the twelve tribes had returned, they would no longer say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But every one should die for his own iniquity,—every man who ate sour grapes, his teeth should be set on edge.

With this higher moral tone, and realisation of individual reponsibility, there would begin, in all other things, a new era of a loftier and purer religious life.

¹ Gen. ix. 24, 25.² 2 Sam. xxi.³ Ps. cix. 14.⁴ Jer. xviii. 21.⁵ Ezek. xviii.⁶ John ix. 2.⁷ Matt. xxvii. 25.

The Law of Moses had required love to God and to our neighbour.¹ Indeed, in Deuteronomy, love is named as a religious duty and joy, twelve times; and hence, even if we were to suppose those right who think that book dates from the time of Josiah, a clear proclamation of the highest ideal of our relations to God and man was an early heritage of Israel. Jeremiah, however, like Ezekiel, brings it forward as a new covenant, contrasting it, in doing so, with the covenant of Moses, which had come to be regarded as enforcing only ritual and ceremonial ordinances, and thus had largely failed in keeping alive a vigorous spiritual life in the nation. But when the tribes have returned, says Jeremiah, "Behold, I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel, says Jehovah; and with the house of Judah. Not like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand, to lead them out from the land of Egypt; which covenant they broke, though I had been as kind and tender and faithful to them as a husband is to his bride.

"But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah: I will put My law in their inmost parts, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they will no longer need to teach, every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, 'Know Jehovah;' for they shall all know Me, from the lowest to the greatest; and I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The covenant at Sinai, written on tables of stone, had rested on fear; the new covenant, written on the heart, would rest on love. The only true foundation of religion, worthy the name,

¹ Deut. vi. 5; Lev. xix. 8.

was thus, once more, brought before Israel by the prophet, though it had never been quite forgotten; for Samuel had set mercy and obedience, before any sacrifices of rams or other creatures, and the words of Balaam had been remembered, and were quoted by Micah, "What, O man, doth God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Jeremiah and the other prophets, however, set it more and more in the most prominent light, as in these verses, though it was our Lord who, finally, for ever set aside the merely external, as, in itself, of moral worth, and taught that he, only, truly worshipped the Father, who did so in sincerity and in truth.

Jeremiah's confidence in the fulfilment of all he had said was unshaken by the circumstances of the moment. "Thus says Jehovah," he continued, "who appointed the sun for light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and stars for a light by night; who throws the sea into commotion, so that its waves roar: if these ordinances fail from before Me, so will Israel cease to be a nation." But, of course, they could not fail, and neither would God's people perish. "If heaven above can be measured," he went on, "and the foundations of the earth be searched out, God would reject Israel; but as heaven cannot be measured, and the foundations of the earth cannot be searched out, He would not only not reject them, but would keep His covenant with them for ever."

JEREMIAH AT THE FALL OF THE CITY.

THE mitigation of Jeremiah's sufferings, by his being removed from the dungeon to the court of the palace guard, proved a doubtful benefit. In the one he might be in physical misery, but he was safe from his greatest danger, the irrepressible boldness of his speech; in the other, he had no bodily sufferings, but his words made enemies on every side, eager and able to harm him.

The Egyptian party still controlled both the king and the town, and would allow no criticism of their policy. The prophet, however, was reported to them as having said that to stay in the town was to die, to go out to the Chaldeans was to live, and that the town would certainly be taken. He was instantly denounced to the king by the junta, and his death demanded. He was a traitor, discouraging the fighting men and the citizens.

Zedekiah would not let them kill him; but, short of this, he was in their hands. Seizing him forthwith, he was put into a great, underground, bottle-shaped rain-cistern, the bottom of which was deep with foul mud, and here he must soon have died if not delivered. Though treated thus by his own people, however, a Nubian eunuch proved his friend, and, having obtained permission from the king, drew him out of his hideous dungeon.

Meanwhile, the siege grew daily more calamitous. The plague raged in the town, the dead could not be buried

nor the wounded cared for; the streets were crowded with contending factions, the roar of attack and defence filled the air, and famine darkened into cannibalism. Zedekiah, appalled at such a stage of things, once more sent for Jeremiah, who had long seen that the unfortunate king was a mere puppet in the hands of the Egyptian faction, and needed only to flee to the Chaldean camp, and explain matters, to secure his personal safety. This he repeated to him now, adding that nothing else would save either the town, his family, or himself; but he had not decision of character enough to carry out the prophet's counsel. "He would be handed over," he said, "by the Chaldeans, to the Jewish deserters, and ill used by them." In vain the prophet assured him that his fears were groundless, and even rallied him on his weakness, for which, he said, even his wives and attendants would mock him. But his soul was paralysed by fear of the junta. Jeremiah must say, if asked, that he had sought the king, only to request that he should not be sent back to his first dungeon.

Meanwhile, the siege continued. But though the prophet proclaimed the near fall of the city, he was equally certain that it would one day rise again from its ashes, and that, though the people would be carried away captive, they would hereafter return and enjoy a bright future. To impress his confidence on his countrymen, he chose this time of nearly universal despair to buy a piece of ground near Anathoth, which his cousin wished to sell, causing two copies of the deed to be written, and the signatures of witnesses to be duly appended. It was a noble example of unshaken trust in the destinies of his people.

The siege had begun in the close of B.C. 591, and, though interrupted for a time by the advance of Pharaoh-Hophra, now raged more fiercely than ever. The thud of the battering-rams shook the walls, stones and arrows rained down into the streets, mines were pierced below the defences, and burning darts showered thick at everything inflammable. But the defence was equally strenuous. New walls rose inside every breach, archers and slingers fought vigorously on the walls, the rams were caught by chains or ropes, flaming torches were hurled on the wooden roofs of the war-machines, and the gates strengthened in every way possible. But Jerusalem was doomed. The pestilence spread, and mothers ate their own children in the agonies of hunger, while, to add to the misery, bloody fights took place, daily, between opposing factions.

The end came at last, after the siege had continued eighteen months. Under cover of the night, the Chaldeans delivered the final assault on the ninth of the month Tammuz, nearly our July, and, after a terrible struggle, forced their way into the town. The deafening uproar told Zedekiah that all was over. His only hope of escape lay in flight. The enemy had entered by the north wall, the one place where there is level ground outside; and the palace was on Ophel, the southern part of the Temple hill. There the town gate, at the south-east corner of the walls, was still free. If Zedekiah and those round him, escaping through this, could reach the other side of the Jordan, they might elude the Chaldeans. Hurrying out, therefore, and crossing Hinnom or Kedron, and climbing the slopes beyond, they pressed on, over the wild, broken, desolation of the wilderness of Judea,

towards the south-east. But it was impossible to make progress over such a country in the darkness, and they therefore had to turn east towards the plain of the Jordan.

Meanwhile, the king's flight was discovered, and troops sent in hot pursuit of him. The steep defile of the Wady Kelt resounded with the clatter of cavalry, stumbling down the pass in speediest haste. The fugitives had not reached the Jordan before they were overtaken; but the mere sound of the pursuit at once scattered those around the king, in tumultuous flight for life. Zedekiah, however, with a number of his chief men, was taken prisoner, though his daughters escaped for the time. The poor king, chained ignominiously, was brought back to Jerusalem, and thence marched off to Riblah, a place ten days' journey to the north, where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters for the time.

At Riblah, Zedekiah was brought into the presence of the Great King, with his fellow-captives. Had he taken the counsel of Jeremiah, and come voluntarily, at an earlier date, it would have saved him; for he might then have pleaded that he had acted under compulsion in breaking his oath. As it was, he had to listen to a fierce denunciation of his perjury, and saw that his doom was fixed. All the chief men taken with him were ordered to be instantly put to death. Next came the turn of his own sons, who were speared or beheaded in his presence. It was the last sight on which he was ever to look, and must have been burned into his memory in every horrible detail. His sons all killed, a spear or a knife presently blinded him for ever. But he had only begun the descending stages of his humiliation. Chained hand and

foot, with his eyes bleeding, and a ring thrust through his lips, he was shut up in a cage and carried off to Babylon, to be paraded before its population, and then thrust into a dungeon till he died. Jehoiachin, his predecessor, was in a Babylonian prison already, to remain there till set free again by Evil-Merodach, twenty-six years later; but Zedekiah had then, apparently, been long dead.

The Temple still held out after the town had fallen, and defied the Chaldeans for another month. Then, at last, it also fell, and no mercy was shown defenders who had cost the assailants so much. There was no longer any pity for a town which had been so long troublesome, and whose population was so stubborn in their resistance. It was given up to plunder, and burned to the ground; the Temple sharing the same fate. Its very stones, indeed, were thrown into the hollows beside the Temple hill, where many of them still lie, buried under a vast depth of rubbish. It had been stripped of everything worth seizing before it was destroyed, and the sacred vessels carried off, to be displayed in the temples of the gods of Babylon. The quiet country-folk around were alone left in the land, the townspeople being marched off to the Euphrates. Jerusalem lay desolate. The Jewish state had for the time perished.

RETROSPECT.

It is very striking to notice how exactly and minutely the office, character, and teachings of Christ are shadowed out by many passages in the Old Testament. The earlier prophets had confined themselves to spoken addresses, so that, from Samuel to Amos, we have little more than fragmentary utterances, preserved only from their connection with some historical incident, though even in these, the grand features of later and fuller discourses of their successors are strikingly anticipated. In contrast to the importance so easily laid, in a priestly and ritual service, on due fulfilment of prescribed observances, even Samuel—the virtual founder of the order of prophets, as we know them—asks Saul if the Lord has “as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord,” adding, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”¹

Elijah and Elisha, the great prophets of the northern kingdom, left nothing in writing. But from their time the prophetic office passed into a new phase. Till their day it had been largely associated with symbolical action and physical excitement. The prophet had taken an active part in public affairs, and had been often a prominent actor in political crises. With Isaiah, the tempest, and earthquake, and lightnings of Horeb, and the slaughter

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

of Carmel, had finally given place to the still small voice of the teacher. The pen records the prophetic words, and these embody conceptions and visions of ever-increasing spirituality and nobleness.

Thus, in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, we have a picture of the future of Israel, which, in its lofty spiritual beauty, prefigures wondrously the characteristics of the glorious and unsuffering kingdom of Christ, and the sublime features of His own personality. The shoot from the decayed stock of Jesse, and the green sucker springing from its roots, are painted in language applied to our Lord in many verses of the New Testament. Thus St. John repeats the name, "The Root of David."¹ St. Paul² applies the whole passage to Christ. St. Matthew draws from it the reason of His being called a Nazarene.³ St. Paul quotes it, in one of its details,⁴ and other allusions offer themselves in the references given in our Bibles.

In Isaiah xxvi. 1-10, the song put by the prophet in the mouth of "the land of Judah," after its deliverance from its enemies round about it, is no less suited for a chant of triumph, at the establishment among mankind of the kingdom of our Lord, in which the soul may well find its strong city, with salvation appointed for its walls and bulwarks. Into it, in a truer sense than into the ancient Jerusalem, the righteous nation that keeps loyally to God may enter, and the Christian may well feel that Jehovah will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him, because he trusts in Him, and that in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, worthy of our trust for ever.

¹ Rev. v. 5.

³ Matt. ii. 23.

² Acts xiii. 23.

⁴ 2 Thess. ii. 8.

The denunciation of Samaria for its drunkenness ¹ is a lesson for our own times as much as for those of the prophet; for, though strong drink may not be so much the besetting sin of our rulers or teachers, as it was in the last days of the northern kingdom, among the same classes, it yet saps national strength to a degree almost beyond realisation. Nor can it be less the duty of the prophets of our time, to make a stand against so great an evil, than it was in the days of Isaiah. With us, as much as with the faithful of the old Jewish Church, the ideal of noble self-devotion, in the circumstances around us, is, assuredly, that we, like the prophets, keep far from any kind of intoxicating drink.

There is no incident in Old Testament history more striking than that of Hezekiah's deliverance from the Assyrian army. His spreading the great king's letter "before the Lord," as actually inhabiting the Temple, and sitting between the cherubim in the dark Holy of Holies, is well fitted to make us grateful that, under Christ's teaching, we have no longer such local and limited conceptions of the presence of the Eternal, but can rejoice that He is to be found wherever He is worshipped in spirit and in truth. Yet Hezekiah's conception of God, as ruling over all the kingdoms of the earth, and as having made heaven and earth, is vastly in advance of that of Jacob, who was astonished to find Him at Bethel as well as at Beersheba. The monuments illustrate Hezekiah's statement that the Assyrians burned the gods of the nations they conquered, or broke them up; representations of their doing so being found on the slabs from Nineveh in the British Museum.

¹ Isa. xxviii, 1-13.

By "the servant of Jehovah," of whom Isaiah so often speaks, it would seem that, at times, Israel collectively is meant, in the same way as the Virgin Mary says, "He hath holpen his servant Israel;"¹ while at other times the prophet applies the name to himself, or to some other person, varying in different cases. In Isaiah² it is applied to one whose visage had been marred till it was not like that of a man, his form, also, being made, by ill-treatment, unlike the sons of men. But in the close of the preceding chapter, we find the sufferings and ill-usage of Israel in captivity compared to a "cup of trembling" and "the dregs of the cup of the fury of God," which may well be regarded as equivalent to the "marring" and maltreatment of the "Servant of Jehovah." Yet nothing, in many of the details, more exactly describes the sufferings, work, and triumph of our Lord, than this fifty-third chapter, which is, hence, with great appropriateness, applied to Him, as "the Servant of Jehovah" in an altogether special sense.

In the fifty-fifth chapter, originally addressed to the captives of Babylon, we have, in the same way, language than which nothing could be more fitting, as a gracious call to leave, not the earthly Babylon, but the captivity to sin in which all men lie till freed by the grace of God. The lofty, moral tone of the prophets is vividly shown in the new covenant, promised by Jeremiah, to be written by God in the hearts of His people, when He had restored them from exile. Spiritual religion, not legal observances, in which they had hitherto trusted far too much, would mark that happy time. Unfortunately the days have not yet come when it can be said that it is no longer

¹ Luke i. 54.

² lli. 14.

necessary to teach any one to "know the Lord, since all know Him, from the least to the greatest." Nor does there seem any close approach to it, either in the Jewish world or outside its limits.

Jehoiakim's wickedness, in burning the roll of the prophet's utterances, must have seemed almost inconceivably dreadful; for a holy man, speaking for God, was, in antiquity, as he still is in the East, one whose every word, claiming to be inspired, is heard with awe. It is no wonder that his contemporaries believed he had sold himself to the evil one, and that the name of the demon who had bought him—Codonazer—was found branded on the skin of his dishonoured corpse.

The ruin of Judah under Zedekiah was inevitable. Assyria and Babylon had alike tried the plan of leaving Jerusalem to be a buffer between Egypt and Western Asia, which the Pharaohs constantly sought to win back from the powers on the Euphrates. But, over and again, Judah betrayed both Nineveh and Chaldea, taking sides with Egypt, its nearest neighbour. In the case of Zedekiah, his offence was especially great, as Nebuchadnezzar had made him swear by "Elohim" to be faithful. Yet it seems as if weakness, rather than treachery, led to his disastrous breach of faith; for he was evidently cowed by the camarilla which ruled in Jerusalem, and declared for Egypt, without consulting the prophet.

Nor had he moral courage enough to go out and give himself up to the Babylonians, though Jeremiah told him he would be spared if he did so. A stronger character might have saved Judah, as well as his own dynasty.

IN EXILE.

ABOUT five months after the city had been taken, the news of the fall of Jerusalem reached the Jewish settlements on the Khabour—a river of Mesopotamia, flowing mainly south, and falling into the Euphrates at Carchemish—the capital of the great Hittite empire of early days—Nineveh lying about a hundred and thirty miles east of the middle of its course.

Now, for the first time, after an enforced silence of years, Ezekiel was free to speak, the fulfilment of his predictions silencing his opponents. The remnant left in Judea still hoped to re-establish the state, but they speedily sank into anarchy and violence, culminating in the murder of Gedaliah, the Chaldean governor, and the flight of the best of the people to Egypt. No hope of the restoration of the land could be expected from such a source.¹ Meanwhile, those round the prophet crowded to hear him, but only from curiosity. Insincere and obdurate, they listened with affected interest, only to disregard and forget. Yet he felt assured of better days, and a return of the nation to its own land; but for this a higher moral tone among them was needed.

He first, therefore, reminded them, once more, of his obligation, as a true prophet, to expose their shortcomings, that they might escape further judgment, assuring them

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 24-29.

that God had no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desired that he should turn from his way and live.¹ If a good man turned to sin, the lapse was fatal; if the wicked turned to what was just and right, he would live. High and low were warned with equal fidelity.

As in Oriental communities generally, the officials of every rank were sadly corrupt. Shepherds of the people, they sought the wool, and cared nothing for the sheep. But God, said the prophet, would come against them, and require His flock at their hand. Scattered in heathen lands, He would gather His exiles, and lead them back to the mountains of Israel, and there, instead of the worthless kings and underlings they had had, He Himself would be their God, and His servant David their prince. They would thenceforth dwell in peace and safety, in their own land: the rains falling in their season, the trees and the fields yielding their fruit, national freedom secure, all enemies humbled, and prosperity filling every heart with gladness.²

Edom, the hereditary enemy of Israel, had gloried in the fall of Jerusalem, and had taken an eager part in bringing it about, but would now be made waste and desolate, after being driven from the part of Judea which it for the time held, so that no more fear would be felt on its account. Its towns would be laid in ruins, and its mountains filled with slain.³ But while their foes would drain the cup of sorrow which they had forced Israel to drink, God would exceedingly bless His own land, to which He had led back the nation from Babylon.

In the rest of the thirty-sixth chapter he thus speaks: 'But ye, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 1-11.

² Ezek. xxxiv. 1-31.

³ Ezek. xxxv. ; xxxvi. 1-7.

verdure, and yield your fruits to My people Israel; for they shall soon come (from exile). For behold, I am for you, and will turn to you, and ye shall be ploughed and sown. And I will increase men on you, even all the house of Israel, and the towns will be inhabited, and the ruins rebuilt. And I will increase cattle as well as men on you, and they will multiply and be fruitful; and I will settle you as in former times, and will even do better by you than in your earlier days; and thus shall ye know that I am Jehovah. I will make men—my people Israel—walk on you; and they will possess you, and you will be their inheritance, and you will no more be left without men (O land of Israel).

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘Because they say to you, ‘Thou, land, devourest up men, and hast made thy peoples childless,’ therefore thou shalt no longer do so,’ saith Jehovah. Nor will I cause you to bear the shame of the heathen any more, nor the reproach of the peoples; nor wilt thou cause thy children to stumble any more, saith the Lord.

“Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying: Son of man, when Israel dwelt in their own land they defiled it by their doings, and their conduct was utterly vile in My eyes. For this cause I poured out My wrath on them, for the blood they had shed in their land, and for their foul idolatry. And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries. I judged them according to their way and their acts.” Israel had thus brought its exile on itself by its sins, but the heathen imputed their calamities to the weakness of their God, and thus profaned the Divine name.

“But when they were carried to heathen lands, they

made My holy name to be dishonoured ; for men said of them, These are the people of Jehovah, and yet they are driven out of His land. But now I must vindicate My holy name thus discredited." Their deliverance from Babylon would be due to no merit of theirs, but for God's own honour. "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord: I do this not for your sakes, but for My holy name's sake, which you have caused to be dishonoured among the heathen. I shall, therefore, vindicate My great name, that the heathen may know that I am Jehovah, when I shall show Myself holy in you, (by keeping My covenant with you), before their eyes. For I will take you out from among the heathen, and gather you from all countries, and bring you again to your own land."

But the old relations of God with them could not be restored till they turned sincerely to His service, and this change of heart must come from God Himself. From Him alone could that grace flow, which would wash away the past, and secure a nobler life for the future. They had trusted in rites and forms, but these were worthless in themselves. The true religion which God demanded, required the love and service of their hearts. "And that you may be cleansed from your sins I will, (as it were), sprinkle clean water, (the symbol of My purifying grace), on you, and cleanse you from all your filthiness and idolatry. And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; and will take away your stony heart, and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit in you, and thus cause you to walk in My statutes and keep My laws. And you shall dwell, (as a people thus purified), in the land I gave to your fathers, and ye shall be My people and I will be your God."

The grace of God would henceforth keep them from turning again to their old evil ways, and God would bless their country, and crown them with favour. But all this, they must remember, was of His free grace, not for their own desert. "I will keep you from falling into your old sins, and I will call forth corn (out of the earth) and make it yield richly, and preserve you from famine. And I will increase the fruit of the tree, and the yield of the ground, that the reproach of famine be no more cast on you by the heathen. And in those days you will remember your evil ways and wrong doings, and abhor yourselves for your iniquities and abominations. But be it known unto you, that it is not for your sakes I do this, says the Lord; be ashamed and blush for your ways, O house of Israel.

"Thus says the Lord, When I have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will cause you to dwell in your towns and rebuild the ruins. And the land, now desolate, will be tilled again,—the land that lies desolate before all that pass by. And then will men say, 'This land, once desolate, is become like the garden of Eden; the forsaken and ruined towns are walled round and inhabited.' Then the heathen, left round you, will know that I, Jehovah, did all this; I have said it, and will do it. Thus says the Lord, I will yet be sought (in prayer) by the house of Israel, to do this for them, (and, in answer to their supplications), I will increase them with men like a flock,—like the flock for the holy offerings, the flock at Jerusalem in the time of her feasts; her towns now deserted will be filled with flocks of men, and all shall know that I am Jehovah."

A PROPHET'S PICTURE OF THE RETURN.

WITH the fortieth chapter of Isaiah a new section commences, which extends to the end of the book. It is throughout a sublime message of comfort from God to His people, then in exile on the Euphrates. They would assuredly be led back to their own land by Jehovah Himself; and there a future, glorious beyond thought, awaited them. But the great deliverance and the subsequent glory, are held out only to those who, through all the dark hours of exile and distance from the holy place, had remained faithful to God and their ancient faith, not to such as had virtually apostatised and denied Jehovah, alike in word and deed, acting as if they were heathen, like their captors, not Hebrews.

In the fortieth chapter the prophet announces himself as commanded by Him who created the heavens and the earth, to proclaim the near approaching deliverance. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, (O ye prophets), saith your God." Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry to her, that her hard service (of affliction and calamity) is accomplished; that (the penalty of) her iniquity is paid; that she has been fully punished, and (for all her sufferings) will receive double compensation at the hand of God.

This summons on the part of Jehovah is presently obeyed. Amidst the stillness that follows the heavenly call, the voice of a prophet is heard crying aloud: "Prepare

ye in the wilderness a way for Jehovah; make level and smooth, in the desert, a highway for our God. Every valley will be filled up, and every mountain and hill made low, and the rocky places shall be made a level table-land, and the rough places a plain." In the East there are no roads; and it is therefore necessary to make special preparations, when any great personage is travelling, to secure him a pleasant progress. Great numbers of men are sent along the track over which he is to pass, to fill up hollows, to remove or bury obstructions, and to make a temporary smoothness before him. Thus, says the prophet, is it to be, on the grandest scale, before Jehovah, who is about to set out, at the head of His returning exiles, towards their own land.

The voice then continues: "And the glory of Jehovah will reveal itself." Jehovah will appear in heavenly majesty, now, when the way is prepared, to lead home His people; and this Divine splendour will be seen by all the world,—“all flesh shall see it; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken,”—and His word, having been given, thus, that He would free His people, He would assuredly do so. Faint hearts among the exiles, however, were ready to think deliverance from so mighty a power as Babylon impossible. But this the prophet is directed to prove idle and weak, by reminding them that man, at his greatest, is only like the grass, whereas Jehovah, who is their head, is the almighty God. The Voice said, “Cry!” And the prophet said, “What shall I cry?” “Say,” answered the voice, “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the wind—the breath of God—bloweth upon it. So, verily, the people

is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God, (His promise to free us and lead us home), shall stand for ever."

The prophet now supposes news to have reached Jerusalem that God was on the way, before His people, or would soon be so. The Holy City is apostrophised, and called upon to announce to the towns of Judah, that the exiles are near at hand. "Get up into thy high mountain, O Zion, that proclaimest good tidings; lift up thy voice with all thy might, O Jerusalem; lift it up, be not afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Lo, there! He cometh, leading on His people to thee." Zion may well do this; for it is a certainty that God will thus display His loving power. "Behold, the Lord Jehovah will come in (His) strength," controlling, leading, protecting,—a mighty one, whom none can resist or stop. "His arm rules for Him." He uses its irresistible power to secure the triumphant return of Israel. "Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before His eyes."

Then follows a touching Oriental picture of their advance over the desert to Canaan, following Jehovah, who goes before them, as a shepherd goes before his flock in those countries. "He shall feed (or pasture) His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead the ewes that have young at their side."

No language could better set forth the relation of God to His Church in our own day. Instead of Jerusalem and Israel, the fold of Christ is destined, we are told, to embrace all peoples over the earth. The way for the Gospel needs to be prepared; but if we do our part, the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it. Nor

is there reason to be afraid of any difficulties or hindrances. All that can oppose is only like the grass or the frail flower, which is scorched by a passing wind ; whereas we have the word of Him who cannot lie, as our security for the triumph of His kingdom among men.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

THE promises to the Hebrew exiles, of God's gracious favour after their return to their own land, like other portions of Isaiah, illustrate with equal force and beauty the rise and glory of the kingdom of Christ, alike as a whole and in its individual triumphs, though originally addressed to the captives on the Euphrates, as a revelation of His gracious design to favour His people, and crown them with future honour, by leading them back to Palestine and rebuilding Jerusalem.

Thus, in his fifty-fourth chapter, the prophet cheers the hearts of his countrymen, amidst the depression which was sinking almost to hopelessness, through the long delay in their deliverance from their oppressors, by the assurance that Israel would yet have a glorious future, with a larger population and wider territories than in the past.¹ Their shame would pass away and be forgotten, and they would see how God had afflicted them, for a moment, for their good, that He might, when they sought Him in penitence, crown them with pitying love that would, thenceforth, never be clouded. Jerusalem would yet be rebuilt, in glory only to be imagined by picturing a city whose stones would be set in fair colours; whose battlements would be of rubies, whose gates would be carbuncles, and whose border would be

¹ Isa. liv. 1-3.

of pleasant stones.¹ No weapon formed against it would prosper, and its citizens would rejoice in unbroken peace.²

But with hearts so gloomy, and often, no doubt, apathetic, it was hard to rouse an enthusiasm in these prophetic visions. Too many were contented with their lot. Many of them might, indeed, sigh at the remembrance of the land of their fathers, but their grief was largely sentimental. Babylon was a far richer country than Judea. They were prospering in it. To return to Palestine would be to face privation, and fight with a host of difficulties. The well-to-do Jews of London or New York are not less inclined to set off for the Holy Land to-day than were their ancestors in Babylon, as a rule; for only a very few could be induced to go back when permission to do so was finally granted by Cyrus. The prophet seeks to rouse them to a better mood. Their material comforts and prosperity were not worthy to engross them.³ After all, they were weighing out their money for that which was not bread, and spending their gains on that which brought no real satisfaction. Let them listen to him, and turn zealously to Jehovah; casting in their lot with those who feared His name, and they would have a reward far richer than the corn and the wine of Babylon could yield. If they really thirsted thus for the favour of God, the prophet could promise them blessings more grateful than water in the desert; blessings so abundant that they would be like the outburst of copious fountains, from which all could take freely, without stint; blessings which might, indeed, be compared to the free and rich supply to all, of wine and milk, without money and without price. Jehovah, he

¹ Isa. liv. 11, 12.

² Vers. 13, 17.

³ Isa. lv. 1, 2.

says, bids him say in His name : " Incline your ear, and come unto Me "—be no longer indifferent and deaf to My call ; " hear, and your soul shall live,"—turn to Me with hearty loyalty, willing to be My people in truth.

The mass of the exiles, as I have said, were far from enthusiastic in devotion to Jehovah. But with those who showed themselves zealous for the restoration of God's kingdom on Mount Zion He would make an everlasting covenant—the abiding mercies He showed to David. That is, He would give them, as His people, the power, dominion, and glory which He had given to the hero-king. " Behold, I have given him"—David, the king—" a witness to the peoples,"—that is, a lawgiver,— " a leader and commander to the peoples ;" and so shall Israel again be, if it seek and follow Me. " Behold, thou," Israel, wilt be so mighty, like David, that thou shalt summon outlying nations, strangers to thee, to submit to thy rule, and forthwith they " shall run unto thee," to cast themselves at thy feet. Israel will be able to do this " because of Jehovah its God, and for the Holy One of Israel ; for He hath glorified thee," showing Himself so mighty and gracious a Protector of His people.

But it was hard to move the cold ungodliness of the exiles, and therefore the prophet once more appeals to them : " Seek ye," then " Jehovah while He may be found." He is near now ; near to deliver His own from Babylon. Seek Him by earnest prayer and true honour of His laws. " Call ye upon Him while He is near : let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." The demand for the religion of the heart, and

not merely performance of outward rites, is very striking. Sincere godliness is the condition of the gracious assurances vouchsafed, being fulfilled,—a condition necessary alike under the old and the new dispensation, and as true under Christ as under the Jewish Church; as truly addressed, moreover, to every “unrighteous man” to-day, as to the Israelites in Babylon.

The mass of these, however, did not believe in the coming deliverance, or in the visions of future national glory in Judea, and did not care for either; and therefore the prophet proceeds with a refutation of their questionings, and to strengthen those who are faithful, by a confirmation of all that he has said in God’s name. Jehovah is indeed resolved to carry out all He has promised. “My ways,” says He to the unbelieving, “and My thoughts, are not your ways and your thoughts.” “I am not fickle and changeable, like man, but keep My word without fail, and therefore will assuredly protect My true people for ever.” The unbelieving insinuated that He had abandoned them, and would never restore Israel,—for where was Cyrus, to whom they looked? Away, against the kingdom of Cræsus, in the farthest parts of Asia Minor; not, apparently, thinking of Babylon! But Jehovah’s ways are as widely different from the ways of men as the heavens are higher than the earth, and they are as much grander; for, while men are inconstant and unreliable, Jehovah is ever the same, and ever faithful.

This unchangeableness will assuredly be shown in His carrying out the promise of delivering Israel; for, “as the rain, when it falls on the earth, does not return to the heavens, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to

the eater; so the word of Jehovah, once spoken, does not return empty and resultless to Him, but accomplishes that which He pleases, and carries out fully that for which He has sent it." In the same way the deliverance will certainly be attained. The words of Balaam are for ever true: "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"¹

The exiles will, then, assuredly be set free, and led back to their fatherland. They will go forth from Babylon with rejoicing and jubilee, not in fear and anxiety; they will go forth also in peace, molested by no foe, for Jehovah Himself will be their leader. The very mountains and hills will, as it were, break forth into singing before them, on their march, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands for joy, when they see the glory of the approaching God, at the head of His people. Not only so, but the track through the dry, barren, and rough desert, will become pleasant and easy. Instead of the thorny shrubs of the wilderness, shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier, shall come up the myrtle; and from that time they shall remain, as an abiding beauty, where there were formerly only wastes, and be an everlasting remembrance of the greatness and truth of Jehovah, in fulfilling His promise by bringing back the exiled nation to their home.

¹ Num. xxiii. 19.

CYRUS.

WITH the accession of Cyrus to the throne of Babylon, the time had come when the captives brought from Judea seventy years before, were to be allowed to return to their old home, if they saw fit. The date from which the period of exile is reckoned is put by some, as the third year of Jehoiakim, in accordance with the statement of the Book of Daniel,¹ though others have varied it a little, on one ground or another. In all estimates, however, the duration of the exile is within a year or so of the seventy years, which may fairly be regarded as a general, rather than a minutely definite, expression.

The number deported from Judea to Babylon two generations before is not formally told, but the aggregate taken away at different times must have been considerable. Nebuchadnezzar, in the beginning of his reign, when pursuing the Egyptians after the battle of Carchemish, took back many prisoners from each land he wrested from the Egyptians, Judea among the rest. We read of eighteen thousand, the flower of the nation, carried off with King Jehoiachin, so that "none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land;"² and the rest of the citizens were swept off after their fellows, on the fall of Jerusalem, in B.C. 588.³ Long before this, however, Sennacherib, who "came up against all the fenced cities

¹ Dan. i. 1.

² 2 Kings xxiv. 14.

³ 2 Kings xxv. 11, 12.

of Judah, and took them,"¹ is said to have deported two hundred thousand prisoners to the Euphrates and Tigris. In his famous annals he says: "As for Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, forty-six of his strong cities . . . I captured; I brought out from the midst of them and counted as a spoil 200,150 persons, great and small, male and female." Yet, as a whole, the rural population were not disturbed, the necessity of retaining a population in the land, to prevent its relapsing into a wilderness incapable of paying tribute, making their removal inexpedient.

During the earlier part of their captivity, the lot of the exiles, in many cases, had been bitter; but, as time passed, things improved, especially from the Jews being settled together in various places, which all seem to have been fertility itself, compared with the barren hills of Judea. Not a few rose to distinction, and many became rich. The old national organisation was everywhere retained so completely, that they still had their elders and "princes," as of before. The prophets had striven hard to keep alive the old national sentiment and religion, but we see from Ezekiel that, at most, only a small number responded to their appeals. No doubt, however, a revival of enthusiasm had begun, in many, before the advent of the Medes and Persians; but even the magnificent incitements to leave Babylon, and rebuild the fallen city and temple of their fathers, failed to rouse more than a very small proportion of the exiles, from the indifference into which time, and the attractions of their new home, now, in effect, their native country, had sunk them.

The policy of the great soldier-statesman who had

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 13.

gained the throne of Babylon had, meanwhile, opened the way for the restoration of the Hebrews to their own land, if they chose to return to it. Before the city perished, Jeremiah had foretold both the captivity and the return after seventy years, and Providence, through Cyrus, secured the fulfilment of the prediction. That monarch had determined to strengthen the frontiers of his vast empire, and its general stability, by humouring, as far as was possible, the national desires of the many conquered races it embraced. With this view, he restored national life to not a few of them, and carefully sent back to each, the gods taken from them in war, or removed from various motives, to Babylon. To have the Jews return to Palestine fell in admirably with this idea; for, since Phœnicia, on the north of it, was warmly loyal to Cyrus, and would bar the march of Egypt northwards, by the coast road, Judah, if once it were re-established, would check such an invasion at the very border of the Nile lands. Cyrus therefore issued a proclamation, which he sent abroad by heralds, to be published in all the provinces of his empire, announcing, as we learn from a translation of it in Chronicles and Ezra, that "Jehovah, God of heaven, had charged him to build for Him a house at Jerusalem."¹

In Isaiah there is a distinct mention of Cyrus as the designed rebuilder of Jerusalem and its temple,² and he may have heard of this; but it seems doubtful if he knew much about the God of the Hebrews, for it is expressly said of him, in the name of Jehovah, that he had not known Him.³ In any case, he was by no means a prose-

¹ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23; Ezra i. 2.

² Isa. xlv. 23; xlv. 13.

³ Isa. xlv. 4.

lyte to Judaism; for inscriptions remain in which he calls himself a devoted worshipper of the great god Merodach, and unites his son Cambyses with him in loyalty to that deity,—the supreme head of the Babylonian heaven. It served his purpose, however, to patronise the gods of any of his subjects, that he might widen his popularity and further his aims. He would therefore flatter the Jews by showing all respect to their national divinity.

The proclamation was a great event; for it announced the freedom of every Jewish slave and called on all who chose to remain behind, to aid those who desired to leave, by the most liberal contributions of silver, gold, goods, and beasts, in addition to free gifts, towards the rebuilding of the Temple. The excitement was immense. Far north, on the Khabour, far off in the wild hills of Media, and everywhere along the innumerable canals of Babylonia, in the settlements of the Hebrews, the one theme was the liberty given by the Great King, to fulfil the predictions of the prophets, which, till now, seemed so hopeless of realisation. The question of Cyrus, "Who would go," became that of every one. But the first burst of enthusiasm ere long passed off. "Many," says Josephus, "remained in Babylonia, being unwilling to leave their possessions."

A number, however, of the heads of septs in Judah and Benjamin, and also of priests and Levites, were moved, by deep religious feeling, to abandon all that could not be disposed of, and to start for the fatherland, that they might worship the God of their fathers, once more, on the mount He had chosen for His Temple, and raise the city of David from its ashes. Earnestness is always infectious.

The sight of so many, and they the flower of the race, preparing to bid farewell to the rich landscapes of Babylonia, and cross the desert, to begin life again on the barren hills of Judah, because these had been the home of their fathers and the land of Jehovah, stirred their brethren profoundly. Vessels of silver and gold, goods of all kinds, and beasts for the long journey, were freely given to the intending pilgrim fathers, and with these a wealth of voluntary gifts towards the rebuilding of the Temple.

Nor was Cyrus himself indifferent. In the great temple of Bel there had lain, since the destruction of Jerusalem, the rich treasure of sacred vessels taken from the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and stored up in the sanctuary of the god to whom the victor had ascribed his triumph. Mithridates, the imperial treasurer, was commanded to bring these out, and to hand them over to Sheshbazzar, or Zerubbabel, the "prince" of Judah, who was to lead the host zealous for their religion and fatherland. In all, no fewer than 5400 dishes of gold and silver, comprising huge shallow pans, for drink-offerings, or other purposes, some of silver, and others of gold, with censers and tankards of the same metals, were duly counted out and handed over.

The great caravan at last was ready for starting; but before it left, a careful list was taken of all its members, from which it was found that no more than 43,360 persons in all, including children above twelve years of age, were willing to face the risks of the desert and the task of resettling their ruined land. There were, however, in addition, 7,337 male and female slaves, among whom were 200 trained singers and musicians, intended one

may suppose for the Temple service, though it jars with modern notions to have slaves chanting the public praises of God.

Of the twenty-four "courses" of priests, only four had zeal enough to contribute representatives, though each of these four sent a thousand of its members, so that nearly one in ten of the whole caravan was a priest. But the defection of the Levites was even more marked; for only seventy-four of these cared to leave Babylon. That there were so few, shows how low the religious condition of the nation had fallen, and how largely it had been assimilated to the kindred race of Babylon, amidst which it had now lived for two generations. Henceforth the Levites, from their very fewness, were able to bear themselves more independently than of old, towards their more dignified brethren, the priests, and to strive for a nearer approach to equality with them. Of the sacerdotal orders below the full Levites, a band of 128 singers of the clan of Asaph, and 139 of that of the Temple watchmen, joined in the new exodus.

There was, however, a still humbler body, who voluntarily marched out with the host,—393 "Nethinim," or temple slaves, and some of a class known as "Solomon's slaves;" the former, as some think, bastards; the most despised beings in the nation, though most unrighteously so; the latter, perhaps, descendants of the Canaanites enslaved by Joshua, and of prisoners of war taken at different times. Great care was used in settling the family descent of all the members of the migration; for the inheritance of property, and the legal discharge of religious offices, depended on the purity of family registers.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

It was only after about four months of slow advance, if the pilgrim fathers from Babylon moved at the rate of modern caravans, that these heroes of a national resurrection pitched their tents amidst the rubbish-mounds, which once had been the walls and streets of their holy city. These, now, had been overgrown, for two generations, with the tangle of thorns and stunted wood which covers the hills of Judea when left to nature, and were tenanted only by foxes, and the wild creatures of the earth and air.

There was little to encourage, and much to depress. The hereditary enemies of Israel, the Edomites, after aiding the Chaldeans to destroy Jerusalem,¹ had appropriated a large part of the land, both north and south of the ruined capital, so that it required an edict from Cyrus to obtain, for the colonists, a few towns and a small territory round the now desolate centre. The bulk of the country had to be left in the hands of the Edomites till they were subdued by John Hyrcanus, about a hundred and thirty years before Christ. Having been expelled from their own homes in Mount Seir, by the Nabathæans, the intruders held their new acquisitions with the tenacity of men to whom they were, now, their only country.

But the Edomites were not the only foreign elements

¹ Ps. cxxxvii. 7.

found in possession of what had been Jewish territory. The peasantry of both Judea and the northern kingdom had been left behind by the Assyrian and Chaldean conquerors, to keep the land from relapsing to a state of nature; but, as the Edomites had encroached on the vacant spaces of the south kingdom, large numbers of foreign heathen, from distant parts of Western Asia, had been sent by the kings of Nineveh, while it still lifted its head above the nations, to fill up the loneliness of Central Palestine, caused by the deportation of so many Hebrews. The returned exiles were thus cooped up by a close circle of aliens. Their territory, if we may judge from the lists of towns in Ezra and Nehemiah, was very limited,—Bethlehem, five miles from Jerusalem, being the farthest on the south, while it did not reach a greater distance on the north.

The first step towards the reorganisation of the state by the "Return," was the appointment of a body of higher magistrates, and the formal recognition of the ancient order of "elders," as municipal authorities in town and country. Over these, as representative of the sovereign power, stood the Persian governor, whose headquarters, one may suppose, were at Samaria. The Jew henceforth, through all his continuance in Palestine, was to be the vassal of the heathen, except for a brief moment under the Maccabees.

But political organisation was a very subordinate, though essential, step, in carrying out the plans of the colonists. The Return had been pre-eminently a religious movement; the result of the long and earnest work of prophets and their bands of godly adherents. The colonists were the children of this revival of religious feeling

full of zeal for Jehovah, and, above all things, set on rebuilding His Temple on its old site; Jerusalem being only the humbly subordinate complement to the sacred structure. Their imaginations were, no doubt, excited by the wonderful visions proclaimed by prophets like Ezekiel, of the surpassing splendour of the new Temple and Holy City, which were described, in Eastern hyperbole, as covering a great part of the country.¹ The reality, of course, was destined to contrast harshly with this dream; but, meanwhile, it fired all to the utmost enthusiasm.

Contributions towards the new Temple were offered with splendid liberality; the heads of clans giving, together, about £12,000 in gold, besides about £22,000 in silver, while the common people gave as much in gold, and about £20,000 in silver. In addition to all this, Zerubbabel, the leader of the exiles, and a grandson of the popular King Jehoiachin, apparently the richest of the pilgrim fathers, added a gift of about £9000, 50 basins, and 530 robes for the priests, who, as a rule, were no doubt very poor.

Six months passed, after the departure from Babylon, before the little community had settled, even in a rude way, in the spots assigned them by the authorities.² The first confusion over, however, the whole body of colonists was summoned to Jerusalem, to raise an altar to Jehovah, on the place where it had formerly stood. In the enthusiasm of the day, the dimensions of that which had served for the old Temple were deemed too small. Had not the prophets foretold that all nations would stream to the rebuilt sanctuary, and bring the glory and honour of the heathen with them to it? The new altar

¹ Ezek. xl.-xlviii.

² Ezra iii. 1.

must be twice as large. But this did not involve much extra trouble; for it necessarily would be built of unhewn stones, and any number of these lay on every side, the interior being filled simply with earth.¹ It would seem, indeed, as if it was begun and finished on the same day.²

They had left Babylon, apparently, in March, so that the inauguration of the new altar would fall in September; and now, from the first day of the seventh month, the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifice was once more seen rising from Mount Moriah, after an interval of two generations. Everything that could add to the augustness of the occasion was concentrated on the ceremony. Numbers of strangers from the various races and districts of the country, added, by their presence, to the effect; for all the people, of whatever stock, were friendly, as yet, to the new enterprise, and desirous of making Jerusalem their religious centre.

Till now, however, nothing had been done towards the foundation of the Temple; but there was money in the treasury, and the soil was yielding the means of adding to it. Preparations had not been neglected. Masons and carpenters were to be had from among the colonists themselves, and Tyrian sailors were hired, to bring down to Joppa, on rafts, the cedars given by Cyrus, from the forests of Lebanon. Gangs of labourers, meantime, were kept busy in removing the vast hills of wreck, left by the destruction of the old Temple, and in levelling and excavating the site of the new one. All, indeed, were zealous, alike, in this task. Priests, Levites, and citizens worked at it, as volunteers, with the greatest energy.

¹ Exod. xx. 24, 25; 1 Esdras v. 50.

² Ezra iii. 1, 6.

But it was not till the beginning of the fourteenth month from their leaving the Euphrates, that this second stage in the progress towards the accomplishment of their lofty enterprise was reached. The stones required had by that time been squared, and a sufficient space for the beginning of the new structure had been cleared of ruins. The day having been fixed, the first stone was laid, amidst a great concourse of people; the priests, in their new robes, forming the centre of the huge assembly round the sacred spot, while the air was filled, as the rite was being performed, doubtless by Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, with the blasts of silver trumpets, the clash of cymbals, the music of varied instruments, and the triumphant notes of psalms specially composed for the occasion.

Yet there were not wanting tears, half of grief, half of joy, from some withered old men, who could look back to the time, when, as boys, they had seen the old Temple, so long in ruins, but now at last, by the good hand of their God upon them, about to rise from its grave. To have begun the new colony by caring for the honour of its God, was a good omen for the future; but there were troublous days in store before His house should be finished. Still, the devotion of noble souls was a pledge of final triumph.

THORNS ON THE ROSE.

THE fair beginning of the great work of the colonists, on the site of what had been Jerusalem, was destined to be very soon disturbed. Before the Exile, foreign trade, and the relations of the kings to the neighbouring lands, had led to a liberality of feeling towards aliens, more or less dangerous to the rigid observance of the Mosaic institutions. During the long residence of Judah in Babylon, however, a great change had taken place in the religious feelings of the little nation. Josiah, before the break-up of the state, had introduced a new era. The discovery of the Law during his reign had given an impulse to its minute observance, hitherto unknown, and this had been deepened, during the Exile, by the devotion of the better members of the priesthood and laity, to the written prescriptions of their religion, in their enforced freedom from the observance of its public rites.

Those who had returned to Palestine, or at least many of them, including the leaders, were hence intense legalists, bent on founding a state in which the exclusive claims of the Jew to be the elect of the nations, should be enforced by the most determined isolation from all other races. Yet, as we shall see, a large number of the general community had not acted on this principle of standing aloof from all the world in every relation ;

for numbers of them, long after the Return, had married wives who were not Jewesses, but of Canaanitish stock, as had occurred within the nation, at different times, from the days of Moses down. This, as expressly forbidden in the Law of Moses,¹ was hereafter to be stopped, and, in fact, was summarily abolished by Ezra in the harshest manner.

But, even from their first appearance after arriving from Babylon, they showed a spirit of unfriendliness towards their neighbours, which had in it the germs of the wide hatred of all other races, which was destined to make the Jew detested, in his turn, from those days till now. The first symptom of this feeling showed itself, even before a stone had been laid in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The people of central Palestine, known in those ages as "the Samaritans," were, like the Jews themselves, of mixed blood, for, as the generations after Joshua had freely intermarried with the races whose territory they had seized,² and had been more or less imitated in this by all successive generations, it must have been well-nigh impossible to find a single person of absolutely pure Jewish blood, among those who had returned. But their leaders resolutely ignored this, and assumed that the young colony was of the most unquestionable Hebrew lineage, and, as such, could not entertain any overtures of friendly intimacy, however well meant, from any of what they regarded as the mixed communities, even where, as in the case of the Samaritans, they claimed to be of Jewish blood. When, therefore, a deputation arrived from the green hills of Ephraim, offering to co-operate with the colony, in rebuilding the Temple

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3.

² Judg. iii. 6.

and the Holy City, Zerubbabel, the head dignitary, with Joshua the priest, and the elders, who formed the senate and judges, declined the proposal. Yet, if some of the people of the old home of Ephraim were of mingled blood, it is certain that many descendants of the Israelitish peasantry must have been left in the land by the Assyrians, of as pure blood as any of those who shrank from them. Indeed, the physical characteristics of the Samaritans of to-day, are, as a whole, much more Jewish than those of many who are recognised by their brethren as Jews.

The truth is, the men who influenced the colonists were leaders of the new school of Judaism, dating from the time of Josiah, but immensely developed in Babylon, who, in conformity with the teaching of the Law of Moses, would have no dealings whatever, farther than were necessary, with any but Jews. The colonists themselves were divided on this point, some resenting such a policy as exclusiveness, others supporting it. The harmony that had hitherto prevailed was changed into the rivalry and mutual hatred of opposing parties, which crystallised from this time, among the Jews, into the definite forms henceforth marking them, as the bitterly opposed expressions of religious life, which we see them to be in the days of our Lord.

The Samaritans, who held themselves grossly insulted, now became dangerous enemies. Zerubbabel, the chief of the Return, was a scion of the royal family of Judah, and nothing was more easy than to represent this as dangerous, hereafter, to the Persian supremacy. Would he not plot against it, to gain the crown of his fathers for himself? The pasha at Samaria listened to insinuations of this

possible treachery. Representations of the risk of complications from this source were forwarded by him to Susa; and the Samaritans strove to add to their weight by sending hired counsellors to heighten the alarm at the imperial court. The evil repute of the Jew, as utterly unmanageable by Babylon before the Exile, would be carefully brought to the remembrance of the Persian authorities. The end was, that the building of the Temple was forthwith prohibited.

Cyrus lived for seven more years, and would allow nothing to be done, though he had originally been so warm a friend. Cambyeses, his son, was too busy with his wars to trouble about the Jews, and hence little could be done even under him. Nor was it till the second year of Darius—the sixteenth after the Return—that the sound of workmen's tools was again heard on Mount Moriah. Gloom settled over the little colony. The golden dreams in which it had indulged had passed away, like the gorgeous colours of morning clouds.

But better days were coming. Two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, appeared; and their enthusiasm roused that of their brethren, with the best results. In fifteen years, nothing of all the grand future foretold by the prophets in Babylon had been fulfilled; for the raising of an altar of rough stones and earth, and the laying of the foundation-stone of the Temple, were not worth naming as the achievements of so long a period. Indifference had settled on the community. Shut out from religious aspirations such as they had indulged at first, they had latterly devoted themselves to their material interests. Fine houses had risen among the ruins of Jerusalem, with costly panelling and all details of luxury; but with regard to the Temple,

it was alleged, as an excuse for neglect, that the time to begin the rebuilding again had not come,—a fresh firman was needed, and that they had not received. But Haggai maintained that the original firman of Cyrus, never having been revoked, was still in force; and his earnestness carried the community with him. Erelong, the sacred hill was again thronged with workmen, to cheer whom the prophet took care to supply grounds of bright hope and confidence. Of one of his harangues to them we have a fragment preserved, as follows :

“ Who among you is left who has seen this house in its former glory? And how see you it now? Does it not appear as nothing, in your eyes, in comparison? Yet, Be of good heart, Zerubbabel, says Jehovah; be of good heart, O Joshua, the son of Josedech, and be of good heart, all ye people of the land, says Jehovah, and work! For I am with you, says Jehovah of hosts. The covenant that I made with you when ye came out of Egypt stands firm, and My Spirit remains in your midst; fear ye not! For thus says Jehovah of hosts: It will be only a little while till I shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land, and till I shake all nations, and the wealth of all will come hither, and I will fill this house with splendour, says Jehovah of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, says Jehovah of hosts. The glory of this house will be greater than that of the former, says Jehovah of hosts, and in this place will I give peace, says Jehovah of hosts.”

These lofty anticipations were doomed, like the visions of the earlier prophets, to remain in great part unrealised; for the glory of the second Temple was much beneath that of Solomon, nor can it be claimed for it, that the presence

of our Lord in it gave it special honour, for Christ came to the third Temple, not to the second. But the earnestness of the high-souled speaker did noble service; for every one sprang to the work with a zeal in vivid contrast to the apathy of the past.

THE PROPHET HAGGAI.

THE appearance of the aged prophet Haggai, or, rather, his coming forward, in the character of an enthusiast for the resumption of work in the rebuilding of the Temple, had roused the now long torpid interest of the small Jewish colony at Jerusalem, to a fresh zeal for this great aim of the return from Babylon. It was in the year 521 B.C. that he, perhaps for the first time, had claimed to speak authoritatively for God; and as his hearers had been in Judah since 537, it was clearly necessary to agitate vigorously if anything were to be done. The voice of Haggai had startled the settlers from their apathy in the September or October of 521. Four weeks later he had made a second appeal,¹ which kindled such excitement that work on the Temple hill forthwith was renewed, after an interval of fifteen years. Three months later, he was heard once more stimulating all to unflagging earnestness in the great task, by at once reminding them of their sinful neglect in the past, and assuring them of the favour of Jehovah, in the future; to be shown, among other ways, by His granting them abundant crops, if they acted piously in the matter of His house.² A special message, moreover, to Zerubbabel, the "prince" of the colony, was added, to encourage him, also, to increased devotion in the sacred work.

A month before this, however, the impression made

¹ Hag. ii. 1-9.

² Hag. ii. 11-19.

by the old man's appeals had been deepened by the appearance of a new prophet, a young man, Zechariah, the son or grandson of one Iddo, the head of a priestly house of the Jewish settlement; so that Zechariah was himself a priest, for the Hebrew priesthood was hereditary. He was also a hereditary prophet, for his father or grandfather had belonged to the order. His style marks the influence of that of Ezekiel, which continued to colour the utterances of all succeeding generations of Hebrew literature, till after the fall of the nation. As they were no longer independent, it was not safe to speak out in direct statement, as Isaiah and the elder prophets had done. Amidst alien races, and amenable to foreign masters, refuge was sought from possible danger, through too great explicitness, in the obscurity of mystical visions, after the example of the prophet of the banks of the Chebar. The Book of Daniel, and a multitude of apocalyptic writings of later date, carried down the mode thus introduced, till Jerusalem had fallen before the assault of Titus.

It would seem as if the words of Haggai had been soon forgotten; for Zechariah warns the people to take a lesson from the fate of their fathers, whose forsaking God had been their ruin.¹ Three months later he was granted a series of "visions," seven of which, he told the people, had been vouchsafed him in one night. They all have the common aim of impressing on the colony, that Jehovah would assuredly bless it, as Haggai had said, if its members were faithful to Him; their fidelity showing itself, of course, in the then present, by their zealously finishing His house.²

¹ Zech. i. 2-6.

² Zech. i. 8 to vi. 8.

In the first vision the prophet sees horses of different colours, sent out by Jehovah, from among a clump of myrtles, to all parts of the earth, to bring back a report respecting them. This they presently did, announcing that the world was everywhere peaceful. No signs appeared of that "shaking of the nations" predicted by Haggai, as leading on to the overthrow of the enemies of Israel, and the exaltation of Jerusalem to supreme glory. An angel, hearing this, cries to God to have pity on His city, and the cities of Judah now lying in ruins, and desolate for so many years. His supplications are forthwith heard. Zechariah is to tell the people at once, that Jehovah is full of loving zeal for Jerusalem, and of vehement indignation at the heathen, who had added to its troubles when He had been angry, though only a little so, with it. He would see that His house was rebuilt in it, and that its streets should rise again from their ruin; that prosperity would again flow through them, and that the community would be comforted after all their sufferings, for He, Jehovah, had returned to Zion.

Zechariah then sees four horns rise before him,—the emblems of the nations that had "scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." But they appear, only to be cast down by four smiths, to the great dismay of the horns. A third scene now rises, in which the prophet sees a man setting out with a measuring-line, as if to fix the circuit limits of Jerusalem. He is not allowed, however, to do so, because the new city is to be without walls, like the open country, on account of the vast number of its inhabitants; no walls being wide enough, in their rounding sweep, to contain the mighty population of

which it would boast. Nor would they need ramparts or bulwarks; for Jehovah Himself would be at once its glory and its defence.

How it is that, with such prospects, so many of the race should stay behind in Babylon, the prophet cannot conceive. Will they not come, even yet, to cast in their lot with the favoured city of God? But in every community there are people of many types, and in that among the ruins of Jerusalem some were found, so beautiful in their humility, as to be afraid the sins of the colonists were too great to be pardoned, and recognising that they had caused all the disappointments of the past years.

A fourth vision was sent to Zechariah, to cheer these worthy souls, and to remove a cause of dejection which would inevitably tell on their enthusiasm. Joshua the High Priest, as the representative of the whole people, appeared to the mental eyes of the prophet, standing before the angel of Jehovah, in robes sorely befouled, while the Adversary, or—to use the Hebrew word, since made a proper name—Satan, stood at the right hand of the angel, to accuse Joshua. The conception of the evil spirit was thus, in Zechariah's day, still the same as it had been in that of Job, or, at least, of the composer of the book bearing that name; for there as here, Satan appears in the presence of God as the accuser. But the indictment not only fails,—Satan is rebuked for bringing it forward by Jehovah Himself, who declares that “He has chosen” Jerusalem. “Is not this man,” (or community), says the Eternal, “a brand plucked from the fire” (of exile)?

Such words, from God Himself, were immediately

followed by the angel commanding those who stood, as His ministers, before Him—beings lower than He, but still angelic—to remove the soiled robes from Joshua, and the priestly turban, which, like the robes, was defiled, and to put on him pure robes and a spotless turban, adding the cheering words, “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel.” When the new turban was put on, further gracious words were vouchsafed. “I give thee assurance,” said the angel, “that Jehovah speaks thus, through me: ‘If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt judge in My house, as well as be over its grounds and buildings, and I shall give thee access to My face, through the lines of angels standing before it.

“‘Nor is even this all. Joshua and his fellow-dignitaries of the priesthood, who sit before him, men who, in their free pardon by Me, are a sign of My designed grace to the people as a whole, may well give ear; for God is about to bring forth His servant, the Branch—of the root of David—the promised Messiah Prince of Judah.’” Then follow mysterious words, as a pledge of the watchful providence that will see all that has been spoken fulfilled. A stone, seen in the vision, has seven eyes on it. It is an emblem of the kingdom of Judah, now so weak; the eyes on it, a symbol of the sleepless care for His people by Jehovah, who will, moreover, “remove the iniquity of that land (Judah) in one day,”—words which have been interpreted in the most opposite ways. In that time peace will reign, every one sitting quietly under his own vine and fig-tree.

FURTHER VISIONS OF ZECHARIAH.

THE series of visions vouchsafed to Zechariah in the sleep of one night, shows how sorely the leaders of the colony of returned exiles must have been troubled in reference to the great work, for which, especially, its members had left Babylon. After sixteen years no progress worth naming had been made; and the long suspension of operations, through the successful opposition of the Samaritans, had so dulled the edge of popular enthusiasm, that indifference threatened to prevent any renewal of activity. Haggai was trying hard to rekindle the old feeling, but, though he had roused a passing outburst of energy, it had died away almost immediately.

Zechariah, therefore, had come forward to strengthen the hands of the aged seer, by independent agitation on the supreme question. He had already been favoured with four visions, which he would doubtless publish forthwith, and now a fifth was sent to him. He had been asleep, when the angel who had spoken to him previously returned, and waked him to consciousness. On his opening his eyes, he found the scenery of a fifth vision before him, and he was asked by his heavenly visitor what he saw. "I have seen," replied the prophet; "and behold there is a lamp-stand all of gold, and it has a bowl above it, for holding oil, and there are seven lamps on it, and seven pipes from the bowl to feed them with oil;

and two olive-trees stand by it, one on each side of the bowl."

Perplexed as to what this symbolised, Zechariah ventured to ask the angel its meaning, but received only a vague answer, which must have left him, as it leaves us, with many possibilities of speculation. In the previous vision, Joshua the High Priest is the prominent figure; in this, Zerubbabel takes his place. Of Joshua it had been said that, if he were true to Jehovah, and carried out his office as God desired, he would remain in the Temple permanently, as judge and overseer, and would no more be accused, but would walk freely to and fro between the ministering spirits who stand before God, and in whose presence, the Adversary, in the past, had brought charges against him. The Messiah, moreover,—the Branch from the root of David,—would soon come. And the associate officials of Joshua, who heard this promise, as themselves men of insight and prophecy, were pledges of its fulfilment.

A wondrous stone, besides, as I have said, was set by God before Joshua, as a further sign, seven eyes being divinely engraved on it,—mystical emblems, as we learn from Revelation, of "the seven highest spirits which are before God's throne."¹ The stone, thus, taught, that the work of raising the new Temple was under the watchful guardianship of the supreme Divine love and care. It was to stand out, moreover, with its wondrous emblazonment of the seven eyes, as the "head" or topmost "stone" of the Temple,—its completion and ornament, shining, resplendently, far and wide, so that all sin would flee away from before the mysterious glance of these sacred eyes.

¹ Rev. i. 4.

Joshua had been absolved from all that was charged against him, and, now, the whole community would be cleared from all guilt, in reference to their past neglect of the restoration of God's house. It would, indeed, be the Messianic time, in the Jewish sense, bringing peace and security under the vine and fig-tree.

Then follows the vision of seven lamps, fed with oil from the bowl over them. The seven lamps are the counterpart of the seven eyes on the stone of the former vision, symbolising, like them, the same seven highest spirits of God, and also the all-present eyes of Jehovah Himself, shining through all the world. The lamps themselves, and their beams, proclaim that, from this divinely vouchsafed centre, stream forth all the energies of heavenly love and tender care, ever present, and ever ready to help. Thus favoured, Zerubbabel will triumphantly finish the Temple, in spite of all opposition, borne on, not by outward human power or skill, but by the Spirit of God, and protected by Him. "Who art thou," asks the angel, "O great mountain" (of difficulties)? "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt be changed into a plain; and Jehovah, through Zerubbabel, after all the trying disappointments of past years, shall bring forth the finishing stone of the Temple, amidst the shouting of Israel, invoking on it, again and again, the favour of Heaven.

Then, in plain language, Zechariah announces what Jehovah has told him to say: "The hands of Zerubbabel have already laid the foundation of the Temple; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who will despise the present day of small things? The seven eyes of God see, with joy, the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel,

as he tries the perfectness of the rising fabric; for these eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth."

Emboldened by this condescending explanation, the prophet now ventures to ask further: "What is the meaning of the two olive-trees, one on each side of the lamp, and also what is meant by the two olive branches above the rest, at the side of the two golden tubes, which empty the golden oil into the lamps below?" "These," said the angel, "are the two heads of the state and of religion, who, before God, are anointed ones, commissioned for high tasks, and stand nearest and closest to Him and His spirits. They are His highest servants in His kingdom on earth, and, as such, they enjoy His fullest illumination and His protecting guardianship." There was therefore no need to hesitate respecting the recommencement of the Temple works, or of any irresolution in their vigorous prosecution to final completeness.

Such a mode of encouraging political and religious leaders, to the building of a temple, seems strange to our ideas, but it is, even now, exactly in keeping with the ways of Orientals. A dervish, who was anxious to further some religious object, would be as much disposed as Zechariah to deal in metaphors; and it was the same in the days of our Lord, for His teaching was chiefly in parables.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

THE grand assurance to Zerubbabel that Jehovah Himself would secure the triumphant completion of the Temple, and that the mountain of difficulties before the popular leader, would be levelled to a plain by the Divine Spirit, was fitted to kindle the most earnest enthusiasm in the colony at Jerusalem. But other visions were also made known by the prophet. A huge roll, or book—as books were then written—thirty feet long and fifteen feet broad, was seen flying through the heavens, the writing with which it was filled, being declared to be the awful curse of God on the sinners of the land. A great vessel, moreover, was seen, the cover of which, on being lifted, showed a woman who personified wickedness, sitting inside, as in a cage. This hideous burden was presently lifted from the ground by two winged female forms, and carried off to Babylonia,—the symbol, in those days, of all moral uncleanness,—Judah being thus freed from its presence.

By these two pictorial lessons the colony was taught that wickedness would not be tolerated in the community to be honoured by the possession of the new Temple. The state, when sanctified by the presence of Jehovah, in the house to be built for His name, was to be a land of righteousness; its “iniquity being removed” from the day when the sanctuary was tenanted by the indwelling God.¹

¹ Zech. iii. 9.

An incident which took place soon after, must have cheered the hearts of the community, as showing, that, amidst all their local trials, they were not forgotten by their brethren on the Euphrates. A deputation from these arrived, bringing a gift of both gold and silver, as a mark of the sympathy of their fellows in the Eastern lands. Crowns were made of the costly present, to be set upon the head of Joshua the High Priest, and then laid up in the Temple, as a memorial of the love that had sent them.

In the midst of this touching scene, the voice of Zechariah was once more heard, encouraging the leaders. "Behold the man," said he, "whose name is the Branch,"—Zerubbabel was a branch of the house of David,—"from him there shall be sprouting, and he shall build the Temple of Jehovah: even he shall build the Temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne," as civil head of the state, "and there shall be a priest on *his* throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." The new state was thus to have two heads, as at that moment,—a virtual king, and also a High Priest over the Church; a constitution which was then the ideal among the Jews, and actually obtained, more or less, till the days of Herod.

Meanwhile, Darius had issued a new decree, confirming that of Cyrus, that the rebuilding of the Temple should not be opposed. Local jealousy and plotting were thus paralysed; and the walls of the sanctuary continued steadily to rise, under the animating exhortations of the prophets,—including, perhaps, others, besides Haggai and Zechariah. Four years, however, were spent in completing the elaborate structure; but at last, in March of

B.C. 516, the sixth year of Darius, and twenty years after the Return, it was ready for consecration.

We know very little of the size or details of the sacred house which had been raised with so much difficulty, in spite of so many delays, and in the face of so much opposition of foes and apathy of friends. With its various "courts," it seems to have enclosed about the same space as the earlier Temple; but if the measurements prescribed in the decree of Cyrus were adopted, the house itself must have been larger than that famous building. The entire grounds were guarded by a wall of squared stones, three rows high, coped with a row of duly smoothed wooden beams. The Holy of Holies, which was absolutely empty, was entered through a magnificent curtain or "veil," and was built over a point of the original hill-top. This rose, however, only three finger-breadths above the floor, but it served as a rest on which the High Priest laid the pan of incense, on the only occasion on which the awful chamber could be entered, which was the great day of atonement, at the opening of each year.

It may be, that the stony spot thus honoured was the one over which now rises that exquisite creation of architectural genius, the Dome of the Rock, formerly known as the Mosque of Omar. But if so, a wide circle besides the portion seen in the Holy of Holies is exposed; for the rough, yellow limestone visible, measures yards across. A railing guards it from sacrilegious approach; for its sanctity is beyond words to both Jew and Mahommedan, though the poor Jew is not allowed to have even a sight of it.

The ark, so supremely honoured before the Captivity, was never seen after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and burned the Temple. Its disappearance gave rise to

many legends, invented to soothe the pride of the nation, by ascribing its loss to heavenly foresight, rather than to the violence of man. It was said, for example, that Jeremiah had hidden it in a cave of Mount Nebo, and would restore it at the coming of the Messiah; and, also, that it had been carried by angels to heaven, and lay safely there till the Jewish Messianic kingdom should be set up. The golden cherubim, over the mercy-seat or cover of the ark, the tables of stone on which were graven the Ten Commandments, the urn of manna, and the rod of Aaron, in the same way, were gone; so that, when Pompey daringly forced his way into the inmost sanctuary of the Temple, he came out reporting that the Jews worshipped nothing, —a fancy which ultimately was exchanged for the cruel fable, born of Egyptian ill-will, that they worshipped the head of an ass, preserved in their holiest shrine. The golden shields that once hung in the outer chambers had been carried off to Egypt by Shishak, in the reign of Rehoboam; and the Urim and Thummim, which the High Priest had worn over his official robes, as an oracle, disappeared with the Exile, to be seen no more.

In the Holy Place, as in that of the first Temple, a single lamp threw a feeble light on the table of shewbread, the altar of incense, plated with gold, with golden censers, and the rich treasure of ancient sacred vessels of gold and silver, carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, but given back by Cyrus. Two courts extended before the sacred building, and in the one nearer the Temple, rose a great square altar of rough stones, filled in with earth, thirty feet each way and fifteen feet high, with an approach by an inclined plane. Not far from it stood a huge round bath, for the ablutions of the priests, which their having so

much to do with blood made imperative. Store-chambers, and cells for the material needed in a sacrificial system, lined the outer enclosing walls, a number of chambers being also provided for the priests on duty at any given time. A bridge on the west spanned the valley between Mount Moriah and Mount Zion.

In the Temple of Solomon, clumps of trees, "planted in the courts of the Lord,"¹ had offered a shade grateful to the worshipping multitudes. But none were allowed in the grounds of Zerubbabel's sanctuary,—probably from the horror of anything like a heathen Temple-grove flourishing near the dwelling-place of Jehovah, to whom idols were an abomination.

A curious sign of the dependence of Israel, in those days, on a foreign power, was shown, in the erection of a military post for the Persian governor and his guards, on the north-west corner of the sacred grounds. Over one of the outer gates, moreover, a representation of the Persian capital, Susa, was sculptured, while, for the first time, the fringe of the outer court was made free to proselytes from the heathen.

No details are given of the consecration of the building raised with so much difficulty; but we may be sure it was carried out with all available splendour. The nation was at last loyal to Jehovah. Henceforth, no approach to its old liking for idolatry was conceivable. Zeal for the worship of the one God of the race, had taken possession of all hearts, though it had needed the bitter experiences of nearly a thousand years to wean them from the love of strange gods, which had marked them in every age, from the Exodus to the Captivity. A sin-offering for all Israel,

¹ Ps. xcii. 13.

of one hundred oxen, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs, with twelve goats to represent the twelve tribes, smoked on the great altar, day by day, till they had been consumed, so far as sacrifices were actually burned,—for a large part of each victim was reserved for the priests and the offerers. A grand celebration of the Passover, when the season for it arrived, made a fit completion of the services; the details given of the whole consecration, revealing a marked difference in the legal exactness of the new era, which the return from Babylon had inaugurated.

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.

THE story of the Jerusalem colony, after the consecration of the new Temple, is left obscure till the arrival of Ezra in the Holy City, in the year B.C. 459 or 458; that is, at least fifty-seven years later. We can glean some feeble indications, however, of its history in the interval, from incidental notices.

Zerubbabel left a number of descendants,¹ some apparently of full royal birth, and others of inferior standing. Of none of his posterity, however, is anything told, in connection with political life, nor have we any further information respecting the colony, till the days of Ezra, except that it sank into such misery that the news of its distress was carried even to Babylon. But if Zerubbabel vanished from history, he lingered fondly in the memory of his people. The wisdom of his son Joacim is noted in Esdras,² and Zerubbabel is made the subject of a legend which ascribes the consent of Darius to the rebuilding of the Temple, to his wit and patriotism.³ Indeed, so great was his permanent dignity in the memory of Judah, that both the genealogies of Christ—that through the old kings, and that through the successive families—are carried up, through him, to David.

A great impulse to the priestly and theological tendency

¹ 1 Chron. iii. 19, 20.

² 1 Esdras v. 5, 6.

³ 1 Esdras iv. 13-63.

of the state was given, by the arrival in Jerusalem of the famous "scribe" Ezra, who was a priest as well as a scribe. Hints that the Law was not so strictly observed, in the colony at Jerusalem, as in Babylonia, had reached the Euphrates, and had led Ezra to ask permission from the Persian king to visit Judah. As he stood in high favour with Artaxerxes, this was not only granted, but, by a royal commission, Ezra was clothed with power, to enforce compliance with the law of his God, in all that concerned the Jewish religion. Requisitions could be made by him, under royal authority, for all the supplies he might need at Jerusalem; but his views were reflected in the fact, that all priests, Levites, and other officials of the Temple, were to be specially exempted from taxation.

Carrying a large amount of wealth with him, he reached the Holy City fifty-seven years after the dedication of the Temple. Zerubbabel, we may suppose, had long been dead. The circumstances of the colony must have been far from bright, to judge from their state fourteen years later, on the arrival of Nehemiah, but we do not find that Ezra did anything to ameliorate them. He was too much engrossed with the letter of the Law, as he understood it. The book that bears his name, records the success of his zeal against marriages with any but Jewesses, though such marriages had been recognised, in all ages, in the nation, as we see in the cases of Moses, Ruth, David, and many others. Large numbers of wives, of pagan stock, but now professing Judaism, were forced by him from their husbands, but only after a hard struggle on their behalf.

Of the next fourteen years of the history of the city, we know nothing. In B.C. 445, however, a new personage, of great influence on the future of Israel, arrived from

Persia. This was Nehemiah, the cupbearer of the Great King. As such, he had constant access to the royal presence, a position which implies the fullest trust in him, since only one on whose loyalty no breath of suspicion rested, could be admitted to a post so confidential. One of his brothers, we are told, returned from Jerusalem with a dismal account of the state of things in that city, though it was over ninety years since Zerubbabel had led the Return, with such high hopes, from Babylonia. The story pierced the tender heart of Nehemiah. Jerusalem, the city of his fathers, still lay waste,—the city of the graves of the flower of his people! The thought pressed heavily on him for four months—from December to April—before he could muster courage to do anything, to gain permission from the king, to try to restore it.

At last, Artaxerxes noticed his sadness, and the secret had to come out, though it made the cupbearer “very sore afraid” to be detected even in innocent dejection. But his transparent sincerity, when he confessed that he was mourning for the sad condition of the city of the graves of his fathers, disarmed suspicion. “If it please the king,” said Nehemiah, “and if thy slave have found favour in thy sight, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may rebuild it.” The petition was heard, and indefinite leave of absence was granted; and the cupbearer, ere long, was in the Holy City, as Persian pasha. He had prayed long and earnestly, and now the answer had come.

One of his supplications, during the months of suspense, has been preserved, and it merits close study for its spirit as well as its language. After weeping, and mourning, and fasting, for days, he prayed: “I beseech Thee, O

Jehovah, God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him, and observe His commandments: let Thine ear now be attentive and Thine eyes open, that Thou mayest hear the prayer of Thy servant, which I pray before Thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel Thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against Thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandedst Thy servant Moses, saying, 'If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: but, if ye turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there.' Now these are Thy servants and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power, and by Thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant, and to the prayer of Thy servants, who desire to fear Thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

NEHEMIAH.

NINETY years had passed since the pilgrim fathers, under Zerubbabel, had left the fertile plains of Babylon, for the grey barrenness of the hills of Judea; their souls aglow with visions of the glory awaiting them, as painted in the magnificent strains of the prophets, concerning the return from the Exile. The waste places of Jerusalem had been summoned, by one of these, to break forth into joy, and shout together, for Jehovah had comforted His people, He had redeemed Jerusalem. The Holy City was to rise from its ashes in wondrous splendour; its stones were to be cemented with costly black antimony, and its foundations with sapphires; its battlements were to be of rubies, its huge castle-like gates of carbuncles; and its encircling walls of lovely precious stones.¹

Instead of this, the city still lay in ruins, after nearly a hundred years; the colony had been, and still was, poor and struggling; so poor, and so struggling, that the story of its miserable condition had been carried back to the Euphrates, and had moved the Jews in Babylonia to the uttermost, stirring up Nehemiah, among others, to try, at any cost of self-denial, to help the city of their fathers out of its calamities. At last, in the year B.C. 445, hope raised its head on the arrival of that dignitary in Jerusalem, with all the state of a

¹ Isa. lii. 9; liv. 12.

cavalry escort, and the authority of an imperial governor, as the pasha of Judea.

It was an omen of good, moreover, that he brought with him firmans for the free supply, from Lebanon, of all the timber that might be required for the city gates, the governor's palace, and a fortress for his attendant soldiery, to be erected on the north-west corner of the Temple enclosure. Zechariah had painted Jerusalem as a city without walls, "for the multitude of men and cattle in it,"¹ but that, as yet, was far from being realised, or even possible; for, though the prophet had predicted that "great would be the peace of her children," enemies still threatened it on every side.²

If any one could give new life to the community, it was Nehemiah. His private wealth aided his public authority, for it relieved the colony of a heavy burden, since he levied no requisitions or imposts, and not only maintained his state at his own cost, but was lavish alike in his hospitality and in his benefactions. That he possessed, besides, the qualities of a leader of men and a skilful diplomatist, was seen in his very first step. Without disclosing his intention to any one, he sallied forth on horseback, in the middle of the third or fourth night after his arrival, with a few attendants on foot, to make a circuit of the little city, and see for himself what would be needed, to make a beginning with the rebuilding of the walls. Going outside the circle of the former walls, apparently near the present Jaffa gate, on the west of the town, he made his way over the mounds of ruin that marked the line of the defences Nebuchadnezzar had thrown down nearly a

¹ Zech. ii. 4.

² Isa. liv. 13.

hundred and fifty years before, and amidst the low hills, rough with wild growths, which spoke of the homes long buried beneath, in the fiery catastrophe which had closed the story of the city of his fathers, pressed painfully on, by the pool of Siloam, on the south-east, till he had made the circuit of the whole destroyed town.

So carefully had he managed this survey, that no one knew of it. But it had put him in a position to act with intelligence, in his plans for the restoration of the walls, which, he clearly saw, must be his first concern. Calling an assembly of the chief citizens, he told them the walls must be rebuilt at once. As this was the word of a Persian governor, it was idle to discuss the proposal, while the slightest disobedience to his commands was impossible, as he wielded the despotic power of the Great King. The whole work to be done was distributed, forthwith, in short portions, to a small army of volunteers, who had caught the enthusiasm of the governor, and were ready to undertake the completion of their share.

Believing that God at last had come to help them, especially as they saw the imperial firman, sanctioning all that was to be done, every one threw himself into the enterprise with the greatest energy. The rebuilding of the sheep-gate, at the north-east corner, was assigned to the High Priest. Next to his portion came that of the men of Jericho. The goldsmiths, apothecaries, and merchants had, also, their separate pieces given them. Nehemiah must have wished that all the work should be done of free will, though he might have enforced a portion on any one; for we read that, even at such a time, there were cravens so abject, as to hold back

from the great task. The men of Tekoa, a hamlet south of Bethlehem, are named as thus mean-spirited. The people of Mizpeh, the old home of Samuel, and the Gibeonites of the same district, cheerfully took a share, though their governor was the pasha of Syria: not Nehemiah. The head man of one-half of Jerusalem, with his daughters, became responsible for another length of wall, and the priests and Levites in and round Jerusalem were equally loyal.

But not only the small communities near the city assisted. Bands of stout volunteers came, from around and beyond Hebron, quite a distance to the south. It is thus, incidentally, shown, that the new population had spread itself over a considerable extent of country, and that, if the mass of the people of Jerusalem were poor, there were not wanting others in easy circumstances, else there would have been no such trade for luxuries as is implied in the presence of "goldsmiths." But the rich were to prove themselves, before long, far inferior to their poorer brethren in real worth.

The task, now fairly commenced, was no light one. Huge mounds of rubbish had to be removed from the line of the proposed walls; the stones of the old wall to be carried off, so far as they were available, that they might be dressed afresh, and, after all this labour, they were to be built up into new walls. To do all this, moreover, there was a very limited supply of labour, in so small a population, and there was no money to hire outside assistance. The huge gateways themselves, with their two-leaved gates, their massive bars, and bolts, and locks, involved no little toil; and we may well believe that the rocky and very uneven

ground added to the difficulties. The labourers, besides, it is probable, were badly supplied with tools; for even now, in Egypt, canal-beds are excavated with little more than the hands, aided by a few picks; the rubbish being carried away on the head, in small baskets, as I have myself seen more than once.

But a still more serious trouble soon appeared. Some of the volunteer labourers were able to maintain themselves permanently, but many were helpless when their first poor stock of food was exhausted; for no one received wages. That they did not leave the work, seems to imply that, while the chief men came of their free choice, the gangs who did the hard work were "pressed," and not allowed to return home. This, also, is usual in the East, and, indeed, had been the system under Solomon, which led to the revolt of the ten tribes. Reduced to the verge of starvation, these unfortunates had to make what terms they could with the richer citizens, to get food while raising the walls. But instead of finding sympathy, at such a time, from their brethren, for whom, much more than for themselves, the walls were needed, since they had nothing to protect, they were treated with the most unfeeling brutality. In defiance of the Law, food was doled out to them only in return for their mortgaging all they had to the usurers,—their small farms, vineyards, olive-yards, and houses, and, in the end, their personal liberty, and that of their sons and daughters; who thus became slaves to brother Jews, though these mean souls were to reap, besides, well-nigh all the advantage gained by the labour thus fearfully costly to the wretched toilers.

Such villainy on the one side, and such misery on

the other, touched Nehemiah to the quick. Summoning the extortioners to his presence, he told them what he thought of their behaviour, and then ordered them to appear before a general assembly of the citizens, which he presently called together. When this collected, he once more assailed the money-lenders. He himself had, to his utmost, redeemed Jewish slaves, at his own cost, from their heathen owners round about; but they were actually enslaving their brethren in return for a morsel of food, needed to keep them alive, while toiling to build walls for the common protection, but especially for the protection of the money-lenders themselves. They must at once cancel all their bonds, and give back the property they had seized. If they could be paid, hereafter, for the food-money they had advanced, either by the debtors themselves or by the community, they were to get their loans without interest; if not, they must regard them as a free gift. Forced by very shame, the harpies had to submit, and were bound to their consent by a solemn oath administered by the priests.

But other dangers loomed before Nehemiah. Sanballat, of Beth-horon, Tobiah, an Ammonite, and Geshem, an Arab chief from the south, furious against the Jews, largely, perhaps, from the rough treatment of alien wives by them, tried hard to stop the finishing of the walls. But Nehemiah was too watchful. Arming part of the workmen, he pressed on the building so vigorously that, in spite of all hostile efforts, the city was ere long in a state of defence round its whole circuit.

THE READING OF THE LAW.

It was not until the population of Jerusalem had a chance of quiet, behind the shelter of the walls rebuilt by Nehemiah, that Ezra the scribe recommenced his policy, of sharpening the observance of the Law. In this, he now had the support of a governor favoured at court, zealous in matters of religion, and unweariedly active.

The first step was open to no harsh judgment. The new moon, which proclaimed the beginning of the seventh month, had been, for ages, a festival, apparently as the first after the close of the harvest season, and thus, virtually, as, afterwards, in fact, the beginning of a new year. No work was done on it, and special offerings marked it, while its commencement was announced by trumpets, to remind all that it was "holy."¹ This old and venerated festival was chosen by Ezra, for a solemn assembly of the people from every part of the little Jewish territory, that he might cause the Law to be read publicly before them, and secure a pledge from them that, henceforth, it should be their exclusive guide in all things. A great multitude of men, women, and young people, able to understand what they heard, gathered at the appointed time, on a vacant space outside the water-gate. This was somewhere on the east slopes of the Temple hill, which are now steep, through the vast quantity of rubbish

¹ Lev. xxiii. 23-25.

accumulated from many sieges and changes, in the twenty-four centuries since, but then, we may suppose, very different.

The finding of the Law, in the reign of King Josiah, had been an epoch in Jewish history. Ever since, it had been the glory of the race, and, especially in Babylon, during the exile from the Temple, it had become the absorbing study of a whole class of learned men,—the “scribes,” whose lives were devoted to copying the sacred books, and giving authoritative expositions of their requirements. This they did, however, in such a spirit of word-splitting casuistry, that, in later times, the simple commands of Scripture branched out into an ever-increasing number of subtle refinements, which, long before Christ’s day, had grown into a second law, as binding as the original, and infinitely more ramified in its injunctions. In Ezra’s time, we read (v. 8) that the Levites “gave the sense” of the passages recited from the Law; and this can hardly mean less, than that they briefly pointed out their practical application to daily life,—a matter involving many casuistical definitions of special cases.

There must have been many copies of the Law, in Babylon and in Judea; for nearly a hundred years had passed, since their fathers on the Euphrates had thrown themselves, with intense enthusiasm, into the multiplication of rolls of their sacred book. Yet, if a few rich people were able to boast of owning such a priceless treasure, the mass of the community must have been utterly ignorant of its contents,—a copy being altogether beyond their means, and no public opportunities of hearing its commands having been provided.

What is meant by the "Book of the Law" is not by any means clear. It may have been only Deuteronomy; but if so, it seems strange that the reading of it should have occupied days. More probably, it also contained at least a part of other books of the Pentateuch. The Temple dated from the reign of Solomon, and no priesthood, in antiquity, could act without sacred books, on the exact observance of all whose directions, the validity of their services absolutely depended; so that there must have been sacred Hebrew books, then. And it would be strange, indeed, if the whole of one book survived till the reign of Josiah, and no portion of any of the others. As to the notion that the Pentateuch, except some miserable fragments, was created after the Exile, I have no respect for the theory, if only because each supporter has his own ideas of which parts are ancient, and which modern, and because each contradicts the other continually.

A platform of wood, large enough to give accommodation to a number, had been erected, and this Ezra ascended, accompanied by thirteen other priests, who stood on each side, making with him two companies of seven each. The people had been sitting, in Eastern fashion, on the ground, but as soon as the great scribe opened the sacred roll, they all rose to their feet,—as the rabbis say they had always done on such occasions, from the days of Moses. Before the reading began, Ezra "blessed the Lord," most probably in a prayer of thanksgiving, like that uttered by David, before the great assembly of the people, at the close of his life.¹ The whole multitude responded with a solemn "Amen and

¹ 1 Chron. xxix. 10 ff.

amen," lifting up their hands to the heavens as they did so, and then bowing their heads till their foreheads touched the ground.

The thirteen, and the Levites, then began the reading aloud, the people standing, as they still do in the synagogues, and as is done in the Episcopal, and some other churches, during the reading of the Gospel. Next followed the "giving the sense." There seems a question, indeed, whether Ezra himself did not read the Law, and leave the Levites only the exposition; but if thirteen men were needed to expound, one would think that one would hardly be able to do the whole reading. That a translation from Hebrew into Aramaic is not meant, by the offices of the Levites, is evident from the fact that the prophecies of Malachi, though in Hebrew, are of later date than this reading.

The holy words had an immediate and striking effect; for they fell on all with the full weight of novelty, and yet with the supreme authority of the voice of God. Weeping broke out over the whole crowd, and could only be stilled by Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites telling them, that this new moon of the seventh month was a holy day, on which it was not fitting to weep. Instead of sorrow, they were to go home and feast, and not to forget to send portions to all their poor brethren, for whom nothing was prepared. To rejoice was to honour God, and their doing so would secure that He should continue to be their strength.

So the crowd, cheered by such words, "went their way, to eat and drink, and send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared to them." This may seem a strange way to

show that ‘the day was holy,’ but so the Levites of those times, and the Jewish people, even under the stern Ezra, honoured a day “holy unto the Lord their God.” The Jewish Sabbath of Christ’s age had, evidently, not been, as yet, invented by the rabbis; for this day of “great mirth,” kept as such with Ezra’s sanction, and even by his directions, was a “Sabbath,” or, to use the Hebrew expression, “a sabbath of deep rest;” that is, a perfect Sabbath.¹

¹ Lev. xxiii. 24.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

THE first day of the reading of the Law to the assembled congregation of the Returned had closed with a high festival, amidst "great mirth," the poor sharing in the universal joy through the generosity of their richer brethren. Next morning saw the chiefs of all the clans and sub-clans, including those of the priests and Levites, with Ezra "the scribe," reassembled to listen once more to the words of the Law, and "give heed to them." The multitude apparently remained at home.

Among other portions read, we are told, were those which speak of the feast of tabernacles; the great feast in the seventh month, so rich in festivals. The passages in which it is mentioned are noteworthy, as showing, in some degree, what is meant by the expression "the book of the Law," though the fact that the feast is introduced in more than one of the sections of the Pentateuch, forbids very definite conclusions.¹ It is, however, very striking to find that the only allusion to the people being required to live in booths during the week of the feast is in Leviticus,—a proof that it, at least, was part of what was read; for it would be preposterous to say that only a fragment of it then existed, or had existed before the Captivity, and that all except this section was an addition made in Babylon.

¹ Lev. xxiii. 33, 44; Num. xxix. 12-39; Deut. xvi. 13, 14.

The Law required notice to be sent out that the feast would begin on the fifteenth day of the month, and last till the twenty-second. This was at once given, that the people might go out into the hills, and gather branches of olive, oleaster, myrtle, and palms, and of any other thick-leaved trees, with which to make booths, as temporary dwellings during the festival week, in remembrance of the tents of the wilderness. When the day came, every one had prepared himself as was prescribed; and a pleasant sight it must have been, to see the bands of people, from all parts around, gathering towards Jerusalem, laden with their boughs, and to have watched them as they set about making shelters of them, "every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts (or yards), and in the courts of the house of God, and in the open space before the water gate (outside the wall), and in the open space at the gate of Ephraim (inside the walls)." Such a full and stately observance of the feast had not been known since the time of Joshua; though we have proof that it had been kept, we know not with what regularity, through the ages since the conquest.¹

The zeal to hear the Law still animated all, and, with Ezra as their religious head, they were not likely to be allowed to forget it. Each day, "from the first to the last," we are told, "he read in the book of the law of God." On the eighth day, the twenty-second of the month, a great assembly was held, as the Law prescribed, for special religious services. The twenty-third was left to the ordinary business of the people; but on the twenty-fourth another assembly was gathered, the multitude having prepared for it by fasting, and attending in black

¹ 1 Kings viii. 65; 2 Chron. vii. 9.

sackcloth, the sign of mourning ; their heads strewn with earth, to mark the depth of their sadness. A sense of shortcoming, which had been felt when the Law was first read, but had for the time been repressed, still weighed on them. Public confession alone could relieve them, and this was now to be solemnly made. Any heathen citizens were required to keep apart ; as the service was one for Hebrews only. Three hours passed in listening to the Law, the Levites reading it from the raised platform, after a solemn, loudly uttered, invocation of Jehovah.

Then came three hours of public confession of their own sins and those of their fathers, made to God through some of the Levitical spokesmen, or, perhaps, as the Greek translation has it, through Ezra. Jehovah, it proclaimed, was the one God, the Creator of all things, and had chosen Abraham, given him his name, and made a covenant with him. God had saved them from Egypt, and led them through the wilderness. For them He had overthrown the old inhabitants of Palestine, doing mighty wonders in their behalf. Yet they had often rebelled against Him ; and this, at last, had led to their being handed over to their enemies, and carried away into captivity. Oh that their covenant-keeping God, in His great mercy, might consider what they had suffered, though in just punishment ; for, from the highest to the lowest, they had all transgressed. They were, even now, only servants of the alien, in the land of their fathers, and were sorely oppressed. Might pity be shown them !

This confession was followed by their making a new covenant, to honour God's Law ; all the chief personages

duly signing a written document, pledging the people, as their representatives, that they would, henceforth, be sincerely faithful to all that the Law demanded. The walls, though some time finished, had not as yet been dedicated. This solemnity, therefore, was now celebrated, amidst great rejoicings, and the usual reading of a portion of the Law. Such continual honour paid to the sacred writings could not be without, at least, an external effect. One that is mentioned was the formal separation of all foreigners from religious relations with the Jews, as they had been in reference to marriages.

Nehemiah had remained in Jerusalem twelve years, and had been able to raise the city walls, and formally dedicate them, but had now to return to Susa, where he seems to have remained for seven years, so that, when he once more reached the Holy City, nineteen years had passed since his first coming to it. Ezra's vehemence had failed to gain his end at all fully, for the separation necessary, between the alien and the Hebrew, was no less clamant on Nehemiah's return, than it had been when the wives were dismissed, nearly twenty years before. The tithes, also, were not paid, so that the Temple service could not be rightly carried on, from the starved Levites having to go off, to live on their spots of ground, away from Jerusalem. This also was for the moment reformed; but the prophecies of Malachi leave faint hope of the improvement having been permanent.

But still another abuse offended Nehemiah. He saw men treading wine-presses on the Sabbath, and carrying home sheaves on their asses, and bringing into Jerusalem wine, grapes, figs, produce, and goods of all kinds, on the holy day. Moreover, a number of Phœnician fishermen,

and traders in many articles, exposed these for sale on the Sabbath, in the Jewish towns and villages, and in Jerusalem itself. Such desecration of the sacred day was intolerable. The chief men of Judah were accordingly summoned before the governor. They had power to prevent such abuses, but probably winked at them, on account of payments made to do so,—as the priests in Christ's day forgot the sanctity of the Temple grounds, because they drew large revenues from letting out spaces, for traders in things used in the services.

But Nehemiah made short work of their excuses, if they intended to make any. Did they not know that their fathers had acted in the same shameful way, with the result that God brought on the nation all the misery it had suffered? And yet, here were they bringing still more wrath upon Israel, by profaning the Sabbath. They had a master to deal with, and soon felt it. An order presently issued, that, at dusk each Friday evening, the town gates should be shut, and that they should not be re-opened till Saturday evening, at the same time, when the Sabbath was over. To prevent disobedience, he set pickets of his own guards at each gate, to prevent any burden being brought in on the Sabbath.

The traders and hucksters, no doubt, were sorely annoyed at such interference with their business, but they fancied they might get some market, by setting up their booths outside the walls, though their hopes must have been limited, when they reflected that the citizens were shut in all the Sabbath, and could not get to them to buy. But Nehemiah would suffer no compromise. If they made their appearance any more, he told them, he would lay hands on them; and such a threat meant a

great deal. The game was no longer worth the candle; and they packed up their property and went, to return no more.

This evil removed, we may presume the gates were once more opened on the Sabbath; for it would have been dreadful to pen up the citizens, within the walls, for any length of time, on the great day of the week. But, to secure as far as possible, a check to any of the evils he had put down, Nehemiah appointed bands of Levites, specially "cleansed," to take charge of the gates, "and sanctify the Sabbath day." Rigid observance of Sabbath laws was thus already enforced in those times, but they were as yet such as, even now, we feel to be wise and desirable, on the ground of the general public interests. It could only have been in later times, that the "traditions of the elders" gradually added the numberless restrictions and refinements against which Christ protested.

Yet it is strange to think of so exact, and so very just, a strictness in some directions, while even Ezra not only sanctioned a public festivity, "kept with great mirth," to be held on the holy day, but sent away the people to enjoy it, with "eating and drinking" and all the light-heartedness of a great holiday, though they were even then weeping, at the remembrance of their sins against the Law, as brought to their conscience by hearing the reading of the sacred book. It was no day, they were told, for weeping. Let them feast that day, and have a fast some other. Strange to us; but there it is—written. The sour-faced Sabbath of Christ's day had evidently not been as yet invented, although the decorous honour of the time of rest was as obligatory then as now.

MALACHI.

THE patriot-prophets of the Exile had kindled a partial and temporary enthusiasm, in the settlements on the Khabour, by pictures of the glory in store for their stony and petty fatherland, and its mountain capital, if, only, its sons tore themselves away from the seductions of Babylonia, and undertook to "raise the fallen tent" of their country, by restoring the Jewish state, in its ancient territory. But at least a hundred years had passed, from the arrival in Judea of the first body of pilgrim fathers, under Zerubbabel; the Temple had been rebuilt for at least eighty years, and Jerusalem, if still weak and small, had, in some measure, settled down into peace and quiet municipal life. The lofty enthusiasm of the days of the return from Babylonia had long vanished, and in its place an apathy towards the old religion, a low tone of morals, and a wide corruption of the community, had filled the better-minded with poignant regret and deep alarm.

Under these circumstances the last of the prophets appeared: Malachi, "My messenger,"—a name possibly personal, possibly official, covering the anonymity of the voice thus raised for the old faith. The picture he gives of his times is startling. Not only was there no sign of the glory promised by the prophets of the Exile, but locusts devoured the crops, and drought withered the clusters on

the vine.¹ Edom, the hereditary enemy of Israel, threatened Judea.² Worse than all, religion had almost perished from among the people. The priests “despised the name of Jehovah,” offering unclean things on His altar, and then speaking lightly of it. To present to God a creature for sacrifice, blind or lame, or in any way sick or injured, was contrary to the Law;³ yet they accepted such abominations, and offered them as good enough. Still more; where only a male of the flock was allowed to be offered, they let deceivers, who had one, present, in its stead, a female, and they actually offered even beasts taken from their owners by violence.⁴

Things, indeed, had come to such a pass that the prophet cries out, “O that there were one among you, (O priests), that would shut the doors of the Temple, that ye might not kindle fire on the altar at all, (and thus prevent such scandals)! ”⁵ God would rather have the heathen than such priests and people as those of Jerusalem. “For from the rising of the sun,” says He, “to its going down, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure offering, (not polluted offerings like yours); and My name is great among the heathen nations, (though despised among you).”⁶ But the guilty priests would suffer for their wickedness. God, says the prophet, will cover them with the dung of the beasts they offer thus contemptuously, and they will be carried out with the rest of the dung, and thrown on the heaps with it. Moreover, He will hinder the seed of their glebes from growing, and give them no harvest; and He will curse the tithes, the ransom moneys, and all other

¹ Mal. iii. 11.² Mal. i. 4.³ Lev. xxii. 22; Deut. xv. 21.⁴ Mal. i. 8, 13, 14.⁵ Mal. i. 10.⁶ Mal. i. 11.

perquisites they receive.¹ No wonder, for they had degraded their office, and caused many to do wrong by their teaching, saying whatever would pay best.²

As to the people at large, two sins, especially, lay at their doors; they had, in many cases, married heathen wives, and they divorced even lawful wives on the most unworthy pretences.³ This appears to mark the prophecy as earlier than the stern reform carried out by Ezra. It was now declared a sin against the nation.⁴ "May Jehovah root out the man who marries a heathenness, and all his race," cries the prophet, "from the tents of Jacob, that no one of his posterity may ever present an offering to Him!"⁵ The prevailing wickedness has wearied out the patience of Jehovah, though He has borne with them so long that they mock at the warnings of the godly, and sneeringly ask, "Where is the God of judgment (with whom you have threatened us)?"⁶

But they will be rudely awakened; for, "Behold," says Jehovah,⁷ "I will send Elijah the prophet, (brought back from the world of spirits,) as My messenger, to prepare the way before Me, by turning the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."⁸ The wide confusion and corruption had broken up family peace, which must be restored, before Israel could be fit to receive its God. The powerful words of the great prophet, so stern and earnest, will be needed, as the line of prophets was to end with Malachi himself. Then, when Elijah shall have fulfilled his mission, "the Lord whom they were seeking, who is the messenger of

¹ Mal. ii. 2, 3.

⁴ Mal. ii. 10.

⁷ Mal. iii. 1.

² Mal. ii. 8, 9.

⁵ Mal. ii. 12.

⁸ Mal. iv. 5, 6.

³ Mal. ii. 10-16.

⁶ Mal. ii. 17.

the covenant for whom they cry out," would come, "saith Jehovah of hosts." He is the "Messiah,"—that is, "the anointed of God,"—and His mission will be to purify the land from its sins, sitting in stern judgment on transgressors. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He will be like a smelter's furnace-fire (which burns away all dross), and like the lye of the fuller (which cleanses out all impurities). The priesthood will be His special care. They ought to have been gold and silver, for purity of life and teaching, but they have become, in great part, dross and worthless alloy. All this, however, will the messenger of the covenant fiercely burn and purge out, by His judgments; for fire destroys all but the pure metal,—burning up dross with resistless glow. Bad priests will be cut off, and then, when the priesthood is thoroughly purified, its members, now worthy of their office, will no longer pollute offerings by their unworthiness; and thus the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will again be pleasant to Jehovah, as in long past times.

The priesthood thus purged of its worthless members, and acceptable sacrifices offered to Jehovah, He will, then, Himself descend, and institute judgment on all the evil-doers among the people, as a whole. "And I will come near to you to be your judge, and (long though you have thought My delay in the past), I will now be swift to witness against all your sins. Against the dealers in the black arts among you, against the adulterers, against those who make false oaths, and against those who grind the hireling in his wages, or oppress the widow or fatherless, or wrong the stranger, and do not fear Me, Jehovah." "For it is only because I am Jehovah, fulfilling My threat-

enings to destroy the wicked, that you, the true among My people,—the sons of Jacob,—are not utterly consumed by these evil ones.” Or, as we may render it: “I change not, but look at your course. Even from old times you have turned from My laws, and have not kept them. Yet so great is My patience and love, that, instead of consuming you, as I might well have done, I now lift up My voice and invite you to return, after all, to Me, that I may be free to return to you.”

But what answer did God receive? They only asked, “What dost Thou mean by our returning? In what have we gone away from Thee?” “Do you think it right,” asks God, in reply, “to rob Me? Yet you have done it.” “How?” “Why, thus; you have defrauded Me in not paying your tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with the curse, and yet your whole nation are continually defrauding Me in these things. The curse is seen in your withered fields, and the locust swarms that devour what is left. But bring all the tithes due to the Temple into the storehouses there, that there may be food for those who serve Me in the holy house, and see if I do not send copious rain, and rebuke the devouring locust, and keep your vine from casting its fruit before it be ripe, and make you so prosperous that all nations shall call you happy, and pronounce you a delightsome land.”

QUEEN ESTHER.

THE story of Esther takes us back fifty years before the time of Nehemiah, who returned from the court of Susa, or Shusan, about the year 433, to Jerusalem, while the great feast in the palace of Xerxes, with which the Book of Esther opens, was held in the year 483 before Christ. In 486 Darius had died; and his son Xerxes, the King Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, reigned in his stead.

The Persian monarchs of the line of Darius had four residences, in different parts of their dominions, to suit the climate of the seasons. They spent the spring at Babylon; the summer at Ecbatana, among the cool mountains of Media; the autumn at Persepolis; and the winter at Susa, the Shusan of Esther. This city was about a hundred and fifty miles north of the head of the Persian Gulf, in the mountainous province of Susiana, east of the Tigris. Shining rivers, among which was the Eulæus, or Ulai of Daniel, beautified the valley in which it lay, shut in by a rampart of lofty mountains. A city had long stood on this site, but it had been sacked by Sardanapalus of Assyria, about the year 650 B.C. From the statement of the plunder carried off, as given in the annals of the conqueror, it must have been a splendid and very wealthy place.

It remained obscure and ruined till Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, a century after the Assyrian catastrophe,

determined to restore its grandeur. The Persians having no architecture of their own, Cambyzes sent a great body of workmen from Egypt, so famous for its palaces and temples, to build a mighty palace for him in this old royal city; but his death, soon after, left it to Darius to carry out the design. The vast mass of structures included in the palace were, therefore, in their brilliant newness, if, indeed, entirely finished throughout, when Xerxes ascended the throne, in B.C. 486.

The campaigns of Persia in Egypt and Asia Minor, countries linked with each other by various close alliances, had led Cyrus, and after him Darius, to attempt the complete conquest of the Greek states on both sides of the Ægean Sea. This scheme, which threatened to overwhelm the western world in a flood of Asiatic barbarism and despotism, was defeated four years before the death of Darius, by the victory of Miltiades and the Athenians, at Marathon, over invading hosts of Orientals. This turning-point in the history of the world marked the year 490. Xerxes was determined to make another effort. So great an enterprise, however, required long preparations, and, to ensure that these should be vigorous, it was imperative that the great officers of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, stretching from India to Ethiopia, embraced in the mighty empire of Persia, should be summoned to the presence of the Great King. The number of troops to be raised in each satrapy, their equipment and maintenance, the appointment of commanding officers, the lines of march, the date of starting, and of rendezvous at some common centre, and countless other essential matters, needed to be discussed and settled; not to speak of the decision on the details

of the plan of campaign. The meeting of such a galaxy of the magnates of the empire, moreover, would kindle that enthusiasm which was the vital breath of such a stupendous undertaking.

Accordingly, in B.C. 483, the third year of the reign of Xerxes, all the satraps, with their gorgeous retinues and high officials, gathered, by royal summons, at Susa, attended by an imposing display of the forces of Media and Persia. The deliberations lasted for six months, doubtless with great pomp of feasting and luxurious entertainment. At length they ended, their close being celebrated by a grand banquet, to all who had been entertained in the immense circuit of the palace, in which, we are told, fifteen thousand men sat down each day at table, at a cost of ninety thousand pounds daily.

The great dining-hall in which the banquet was held, seven days being needed to feast the vast numbers invited, has recently been excavated, and is found to have enclosed a space of an acre and a half, with a double portico on three of its sides. Its flat roof was supported by fluted columns, over eighteen feet in diameter, elaborately decorated, and surmounted by a cornice of two great bulls' heads. From the lofty tops of this forest of marble or porphyry columns, the double-headed bulls gleamed down, with horns, feet, eyes, and necks covered with thin plates of gold. Under a network of cedar rafters, resting on cedar cornices, the feast was spread. The great walls glittered with enamelled bricks, covered with the most exquisite ornamental work. A cornice of enamelled tiles, of turquoise blue, rose above, and screens of the finest wood-carving, with hangings of

the three royal colours, white, green, and purple-blue, veiled the many entrances, and were looped by cords of fine linen and purple, to silver cylinders, or marble pillars. The dining-couches were of silver and gold, the pavement of alabaster, white and black marble, and mother-of-pearl, over which were spread countless carpets of the finest looms of Babylonia and Sardis. Everything else was in keeping. The very wine-goblets were of gold, and the finest vintages flowed like water. High above all the carousers, sat Xerxes, on a golden throne, under a crimson canopy, embroidered with gold and resting on golden supports.

But the rejoicings were destined to have a touch of the tragic before they closed. On the seventh day, when Xerxes had inflamed himself with wine, he so far forgot his dignity and the rules of state propriety, as to order the seven court eunuchs to bring in his chief queen Vashti, that he might let the company see her charms. But her majesty had more respect to the king's honour and her own, than to expose herself thus, before a mob of half-drunken nobles, contrary to the rules of Eastern modesty, and would not obey. It was enough. She had enemies, of course, among the courtiers; and hence "the wise men," when consulted, advised the infuriated king to dismiss her, which he accordingly did.

Shortly after, he set out for Greece, and returned to Susa only at the end of four years. Vashti was gone. Who should take her place? Finally a young Jewess was chosen by Xerxes, in ignorance of her nationality. She was the cousin of a Jew who held some post in the huge palace population. This relative, Mordecai

by name, was fortunate enough to discover a plot laid against the king's life, which was duly revealed to Xerxes by the new queen,—Esther. The disclosure proved, at a later time, of the highest importance to the interests of Mordecai.

The East is the very seed-plot of such crooked intrigues; and another plot was contrived by the highest of the dignitaries of the court,—Haman, apparently a last survivor of the chiefs of the Amalekites, and hence a hereditary enemy of the Jew. Finding that he was slighted by Mordecai, who was evidently a Jew, he vowed vengeance against all the race, so far as they were to be found in the wide bounds of the empire. But this, again, was discovered by Mordecai, who soon found means to tell the bad news to Esther. She, perhaps, might keep the king from permitting the crime to be carried out. It was dangerous to approach him, when not summoned to do so; but she would perish if the plot was carried out, while, if she succeeded, she would save, not only her own life, but the lives of her people over the whole empire. Strong-minded, and loyal to her cousin and her people, she resolved to risk all, in the attempt to save their lives and her own.

At her request, a fast of three days was kept by all the Jews in Susa, while Esther herself, and her maidens, fasted inside the palace. The three sad days over, the queen prepared for her perilous task. Putting on her royal apparel, she boldly went into the inner court of the palace, from which she could be seen by the king, who, at the moment she had chosen, was sitting on his throne. It was a daring act; for the

fears of despotism had made it a law, that any one who entered the inner court, unsummoned, should be put to death, unless the king should hold out his golden sceptre, as a sign that their life was to be spared. Would Xerxes hold it out now? Her anxiety was soon relieved; for, when he saw the queen standing in the court, he was moved kindly towards her, and held out the symbol of forgiveness and favour. She, therefore, approached the earthly lord of life and death, and, as was required, touched the top of the sceptre. Xerxes welcomed her with effusion! What did she wish? Only let her tell him, and she should have it, even "to the half of his kingdom."

The result is known. Measures were taken which not only prevented a massacre of the Jews, but enabled them to inflict heavy revenge on their enemies,—a spirit in which, unfortunately, we find even Esther indulging to a painful extent. Meanwhile, Haman fell under the displeasure of his master, and, with all his sons, was hung up on a great pole, on which he had intended to have hung Mordecai.

LOOKING BACK.

THE contrast between the dreams of poetry or enthusiasm, and the cold realities of experience, is as noticeable in the life of a race as in that of an individual. The laureates of ancient Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, no doubt, indulged in the most glowing visions of the future of their respective countries, though, as was inevitable under a despotism, mainly in prophecies of the undying grandeur of the reigning dynasty. But the site of Babylon is a wide labyrinth of marsh and silent waste. Nineveh, for centuries before Christ, had lain hidden so deeply beneath the mounds of its own ruin, that even its name had been forgotten; and Egypt, for millenniums, has been the prey of successive conquerors.

In the same way, the Hebrews pictured for themselves, while still beyond the Jordan, a bright career of peace and prosperity, only to find before them the bitter realities of the times of the judges, and the troubled centuries of their kings; ending in deportation to Assyria and Babylon. The fortunes of those who returned were no less disappointing. Instead of the national splendour and glory they fondly anticipated, they had to endure long-continued misery, with a capital left open to its enemies for nearly a hundred years, and were never, except for a brief moment, to taste national independence.

Only about forty-three thousand persons, all told, had

listened to the appeals of the prophets, and set out for the fatherland, from the fertile plains of Babylonia, to find, on their arrival, that enemies held the land so completely, that an edict from Babylon was needed, to secure them a small district immediately round the stony heights of Jerusalem. In six months the colonists had raised rude homes for themselves, among the dreary mounds of rubbish under which the Holy City lay buried; had organised themselves as a community; and had set up a huge altar of rough stones, from which rose the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifice.

The fourteenth month of their residence had come before even the foundation-stone of their Temple was laid; and eighteen weary years of opposition and anxiety were to pass before it was finished. The delay, indeed, was ominous; for it rose from the exclusiveness of the leaders of the new settlers, who would have no friendly relations with the Samaritan population, and rejected their advances, though at once modest and flattering; their offer of alliance being urged on the ground of a common homage to Jehovah, and the belief that they, also, belonged to the Jewish stock,—which they probably did, in many cases. Some, no doubt, were of mixed blood, but only with other Semitic races; and not a few must have been the descendants of the population, left undisturbed by Assyria, in the country districts, when the northern tribes were carried off to Nineveh. On the other hand, the small band in Judea must have been largely of doubtful ancestry, since marriages with the native populations had always been numerous.

At last, fifty-eight years after the consecration of the poor, small Temple, that had risen in place of the glory of

the sanctuary built under Solomon, a fresh start was given to Jerusalem, by the arrival from Babylon of a second caravan, under Ezra, in 458 B.C. It proved, however, that this personage had little interest in anything, except the reconstitution of the community on the basis of rigid exclusiveness; in carrying out which he embroiled the colony with its neighbours, still more seriously than Zerubbabel had done, nearly eighty years before. He insisted that all wives of other than Jewish race, though mothers of families, should be dismissed, though their husbands, in marrying them, had only done what had been recognised as a custom of their fathers, which hitherto had not been denounced, or even challenged.

Thirteen years after Ezra's arrival—that is, more than ninety years after the Return—the position of the colony was still miserable in the extreme,—thanks, no doubt, in great part, to the policy of Zerubbabel, at first, and of Ezra, two generations later. But, now, at last, a strong man was coming, who, while maintaining the invidious arrangements of the past, would take the steps necessary for the protection of Jerusalem by walls, and thus give it a possibility of development. Nehemiah found things as bad, morally, as they well could be; so little success, in any true sense, had followed the harshness of Ezra.

The short tract which bears the name of the prophet Malachi, and the few incidents recorded in that which bears the name of Nehemiah, reveal a community of a very low moral type. The well-to-do few are actually described as making slaves of their fellow-Hebrews, to reimburse themselves for food, allowed them while they were building the town wall,—so vital a benefit to the rich usurers, and so indispensable a necessity for the city

and state. It shows them, moreover, taking everything the toiling peasant had—his land, his crop, his very wife and children—to pay for the daily bread of the wretched public labourer, in such a crisis. We see the priesthood and the Levite left to starve, by the withholding of the tithes, and the community, at large, palming off on Jehovah “polluted bread,” and blind, lame, torn, and sick creatures for their offerings; thus trying to cheat even God Almighty, to save a few pence.

Nor had the hard policy of Ezra remained without its due fruit; for the prophet tells us, that divorce without just grounds had become frequent, causing such agony to the innocent victims that they, as it were, covered “the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out.” He adds, that the forbidden black arts of heathenism, adultery, false swearing, defrauding the hireling in his wages, defrauding, also, the widow and the fatherless, most despicable forms of greedy meanness, and turning aside the alien from his legal rights, were so common, that he, himself, testified against the community, on account of such wickedness, before the Lord.

The strange contrast, of the strictness with which trading on the Sabbath was condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem, while the community was actually on one occasion told to cease weeping for their sins, though it was the Sabbath on which the Law was being read to them, and to go home, and eat, and drink, and make merry, waiting till another time to be sad, seems very curious to our ideas of the proper observance of the holy day.

The story of Esther is still read among the Jews, at the yearly feast called Purim; the synagogue congregation

which hears it breaking out into the wildest uproar of hissing and execration, at the mention of the name of Haman. It is a strange fact that, in the Hebrew Bible, the names of Haman's sons are put one over the other, to indicate that the poor creatures were thus hung up, below their father, on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

THE YOUTH OF DANIEL.

THE close of the seventh century before Christ was an eventful time in the history of Western Asia. In its last ten years, Nineveh, and with it the great Assyrian Empire, fell before the attack of its hereditary enemies, Babylon, Media, and Elam; the throne of Babylon having been previously seized by the Assyrian viceroy, Nabopolassar, the father of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, who took advantage of the troubles of his imperial master at Nineveh, to rise against him, and found an independent throne. Then came Pharaoh-Necho, from Egypt, hoping to seize some of the Assyrian provinces west of the Euphrates, and thus extend the dominions of the Nile valley to the limits they had proudly reached in the grand days of Thothmes III., nine hundred years before.

But his triumph proved short-lived. Nebuchadnezzar, the generalissimo of his father, now Sultan of Babylonia, crushed him in the battle of Carchemish, and then pressed after his retreating forces, across Western Asia, to the borders of Egypt, which he proposed to humble, by a decisive campaign, beyond the power of future aggression, outside its African limits. But at that moment came news that Nabopolassar was dead, and a hasty march across the desert, with a picked body of light-armed troops, was instantly begun by Nebuchadnezzar, to secure

for himself the throne of his father before any dispute could rise about the succession.

The good King Josiah, of Judah, had been killed in the disastrous battle of Megiddo, fought in rash audacity by him, as a vassal of the powers on the Euphrates, against Pharaoh-Necho; and Jerusalem had begun its last swift descent towards ruin, through the accession to its throne of Jehoiakim, the worthless son of the dead king, whom the little nation so deeply mourned. Awed by Pharaoh-Necho's victory at Megiddo, the new monarch had revolted from vassalage to Babylonia, the heir of the Assyrian Empire, his former suzerain, and had thrown himself into the arms of Egypt. For this, Nebuchadnezzar, on his march to the Nile, had summoned Jerusalem to surrender, in the third year of the new reign, but contented himself with Jehoiakim's submission, and a formal acknowledgment of conquest, sealed by the delivery to the Chaldeans, of part of the gold and silver vessels used in the Temple worship, which were carried off, and laid up in the "treasure-house of his god in Babylon," and by receiving a number of the chief youth of Judea, as hostages, to be brought up at Babylon; that they might, from their opening manhood, be Chaldean in sympathies and loyalty, and thus influence their countrymen in the future. As things turned out, however, they never returned; Jerusalem passing from one revolt to another, till, in B.C. 588, it was burned to the ground, its walls thrown down, and its Temple left a heap of smoking ruins.

Among the youths thus led in the train of the Great King, for education at his court, were four whose names have come down to us,—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; the favoured few, chosen, from perhaps a large

number, by the lord high chamberlain, Ashpenaz, on account of their freedom from any blemish, their personal beauty, and their intellectual brightness, for special preparation to act as pages to Nebuchadnezzar, and to stand before him. Babylonia had for ages been famous for its great schools, in which the priests and learned men were trained in the "wisdom" of the day, including, among other things, more especially, the study of astrological science and the magic arts, by which divination was thought possible. A sign from the gods was held essential before any step could be taken in affairs of state; and hence, dreams, omens, the relative position of the planets at a given moment, and much else, demanded vast industry to class, for explanation as to their import, under fixed rules, contained in countless treatises.

In accordance with Oriental custom, youths chosen for court training were taken into the palace, and maintained at the king's expense; eating from the royal kitchens, and in all respects treated as members of his vast household. They also received new Babylonian names. "Daniel," which means "The judge of God,"—that is, "One who judges in the name of God" (or, My judge is God),—was put aside for "Belteshazzar,"—"Protect his life!" "Hananiah" became "Shadrach,"—a word of doubtful meaning. "Mishael"—"Who is like God?"—was henceforth known as "Meshach,"—a name not yet explained; and "Azariah,"—"Whom Jehovah helps,"—became "Abed-nebo" (not "nego"), "The servant of (the god) Nebo."

If, however, the officials supposed that, by changing the names of the youths, they would change their principles, and turn them from Jehovah to the gods of Babylon, they were in a great error. Ever since the "Law" had

been found in a lumber-room of the Temple, during the reign of Josiah, the homage paid to it had been increasingly profound; and it is, hence, nothing strange, that Daniel and his companions resolved to be faithful to it, even to the extent of observing minutely its rules of Levitical "cleanness" in regard to their food. The "king's meat" might be part of sacrifices offered to idols, or it might have been inspected with heathen rites, and the wine which he drank might have been defiled by priestly invocations or otherwise. Daniel, therefore, begged the high chamberlain, or perhaps the chief butler, to excuse him from taking food or drink which might thus be unlawful in a Jew to accept.

Fortunately, Daniel was in high favour with this official, but, in terror at the awful absolutism of the king, which could in a moment, on any ground, order his execution, he hesitated to allow so great an innovation. It might tell on the health of his young friend and his companions, and be fatal to himself, if the king heard of it. Daniel, however, overcame his scruples by proposing that the change might be permitted for a short time, by way of experiment; the result, after ten days, determining whether there was ground for alarm.

The exchange thus made, for conscience' sake, was no light one. Meals from the royal table, of every possible delicacy, and wine of the finest growth, must have had great temptations to most. Instead of all this, however, the four Hebrews asked and obtained a simple vegetable diet, such as was eaten in half-fasts,—mainly, it would seem, of legumes, such as beans and lentils, with no drink but water. But the trial was in Daniel's favour; for he and his friends, at the end of the ten days, were declared

to look better than any of the others who had fared royally.

Nor can there be a doubt that the disuse of wine would be of benefit to them ; for health does not need stimulants, and, as we see from the experiments of John Hunter, even wine, causes a feverishness hurtful to many, but especially to the young. Their brain, also, as well as their bodies, was the better for their self-denial, the four being declared by Nebuchadnezzar to be "ten times" as good, in "all matters of wisdom and understanding," as all the "magicians and astrologers" through the land.

Simplicity in diet, and total abstention from strong drink, have thus the great support, as supremely desirable, of this famous illustration. Well would it be for all workers, whether with hand or brain, if, like Daniel, they were faithful to their conscience, when they see by the result, not only in the case of Daniel, but of a countless multitude in our own day, that his course was not only wise, but right.

THE KING'S DREAM.

DANIEL had been carried off to Babylon "in the third year of Jehoiakim," which was the second year before Nebuchadnezzar, from crown prince, became "the Great King," on the death of his father, Nabopolassar.

His physical training, to develop personal vigour, occupied years; and he had to pass through the various branches of "wisdom," "knowledge," and "science," comprised in the "learning" of the Chaldeans. He had, first, to learn to read and write the living language of Assyria, with its endless combinations of wedge-shaped characters, like the hieroglyphs and ideographs of China for their puzzling complications, and also in the fact that different pronunciations gave entirely different meanings to the same character. But it was necessary that the student, preparing for a position among the *literati* of the court, should further master another language long dead, the Akkadian, which had been superseded by the "Chaldean," but was, still, that in which the great treatises on the gods, on "science," and on magic, the mastery of which was indispensable for a liberal education, were veiled from illiterate eyes.

The greatest importance was attached, in antiquity, to the "visions" of the night, which were regarded as communications from the spirit-world, full of the gravest meaning when rightly interpreted. The annals of the

Egyptian Pharaohs, as well as those of the Assyrian kings, show this no less vividly than the narratives of Scripture. But, in Nebuchadnezzar's case, anxiety to learn the gracious revelations of the gods was heightened, by the fact that he had forgotten the details of the dream, and might naturally fear that his having done so might bring him evil, by offending the higher powers. A hasty summons, therefore, was issued by the king, that all the court interpreters of the intimations of the gods, should at once assemble, "to shew the king his dreams."

Forthwith, the whole body, doubtless in the greatest excitement, gathered from their various colleges, and hurried to the audience-chamber, to hear the communication which their lord had to make to them. Presently, the grand curtains of the hall were drawn aside, and Nebuchadnezzar, the king of kings, stood before them. "O king, live for ever," rose from the splendid, many-voiced throng, as he appeared; every one, as he spoke, sinking prostrate on the gorgeously carpeted floor, with his face touching it, till they were all permitted to rise.

Then an awful surprise awaited them. "I have forgotten my dream," said the king. "But," he continued, "if you do not tell it me, and also give me a true interpretation, you will be cut in pieces, and your houses made a dunghill. If, however, you tell it me, and explain it, you shall be richly rewarded and greatly honoured." The punishment threatened was thoroughly Babylonian, and, indeed, Sennacherib had carried it out on a whole city, after the great rebellion. The awful despotism of Oriental kings is almost beyond our conception. They were regarded as virtual gods, and their will was viewed as the will of the godhead. "The true Persian," says one,

rejoices to be allowed to kiss the hand of his ruler, even if it be stained with his child's blood. Cambyzes has put my brother to death, but I murmur at him no more for it, than I did at the godhead who took my parents from me."

"There is not a man on earth who can do what the king requireth," groaned out the head of the magi; "nor is there any king, lord, or ruler, that asks such a thing as thou, O king, demandest, because they know it cannot be done. Only the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh, can do what thou wishest." But the despot, furious that his wildest whim could not be gratified, ordered that all the wise men in Babylonia should, forthwith, be killed,—the bodyguard being always the executioners of the king's wrath in the East, as we often see in the historical books of Scripture.

The fate of Daniel and his companions as members of the magian caste seemed to be sealed; but he was able to temporise with the headsman, and get from him the reason of this sudden action on the part of Nebuchadnezzar. Seeking an audience forthwith, he boldly told the king that, if time were given, he would solve the mystery and relieve the royal mind. This granted, he and his companions, we are told, betook themselves to earnest prayer, with the result that the secret was revealed to Daniel, in a dream, as he slept.

Admitted to the presence, he bore himself nobly. The God of heaven, he said, had made the dream and its meaning known to him. The king had seen a great image, of shining brightness and terrible aspect; its head of fine gold, its arms and breast of silver; thence, to its knees, of brass; then, to its feet, of iron, the feet

themselves being partly iron and partly clay. As he gazed, however, wondering at the appearance, a stone was seen by him, cut out without hands, which smote in pieces the feet of the image; and the whole of its huge bulk was thus brought down at one stroke; the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold being so pulverised by the crash, that all, alike, became mere dust in the wind, and was carried away by it, wholly disappearing. The mysterious stone, however, grew a vast mountain, and filled the whole earth.

This, said Daniel, was the dream; he would now give the king its interpretation. He, himself, was the radiant head of gold. God had given him a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory, over all the earth. After him, there would rise a kingdom inferior to him; then a third kingdom, of brass, which would bear rule over all the earth; next, a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, breaking and subduing all things before it. It would, however, be ere long divided, one part remaining strong, the other soon showing weakness. Lastly, the God of heaven would set up a kingdom which should never be destroyed, but would break in pieces and destroy all these kingdoms, and itself stand for ever.

Where there have been so many opinions respecting these kingdoms, it would be very foolish to assume an air of infallibility; but it can do no harm to recall the different powers that succeeded one another in Western Asia, which was practically the limit of Hebrew thought and interest. The heir to the Chaldean world-kingdom was the Medo-Persian, which, however, was soon merged in the far grander, all-embracing sweep of the kingdom, of the Persians,—the third in the king's vision. Next

appeared the amazing, irresistible, iron kingdom of Alexander of Macedon, "breaking in pieces, bruising, and subduing all things," as far, even, as dreamily remote India. But the early death of the wonderful genius who, in his glimpse of life, had wrought such miracles, brought with it the "dividing" of his vast dominions,—the Syrian Empire, whose rulers took their name from their capital, Antioch, seizing one part, and the Ptolemies, whose seat was at Alexandria, in Egypt, grasping the other. Of these, as the vision indicated, the one, Syria, was much stronger than the other, the Nile kingdom; but both were to be merged in a kingdom set up by the God of heaven, which should "consume" all other kingdoms, and itself stand for ever.

To the average Jew, this fourth kingdom, the kingdom of God, would stand for the rule of his own people over all kingdoms and races of men. This, as we constantly see in the Gospels, was the assumption of the nation in our Lord's time, even His disciples clinging to it, in the face of what their Master said, of a more spiritual fulfilment of the prophecy. The literal interpretation, no doubt, exerted a great influence on their history. When he was crushed by the Syro-Greek tyranny, the hope of such a future would rouse the Jew to a heroic struggle with his oppressors, as being not more his enemies than they were the enemies of the kingdom of God. Thus may well have been generated the grand enthusiasm which burst out in the victorious revolt under the Maccabees (B.C. 165).

THE GOLDEN IMAGE.

DANIEL and his companions, after their elevation through the "wisdom" of Daniel, in the interpretation of the king's dream, seem to have enjoyed their honours in peace till the eighteenth, or, it may be, the twenty-eighth, year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Meanwhile, Babylon had been transformed into one of the wonders of the world, by the great temples, palaces, and other public buildings, raised by the splendour-loving monarch,—the hanging-gardens he had created, and the amazing walls with which he had surrounded his metropolis. Amidst so much glory his heart swelled with pride, and he was heard boasting, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" Such a triumph, he thought, must be celebrated by a fitting acknowledgment to his god, who had crowned him with so much magnificence. He would erect to him a great image, covered with plates of gold, and rising, though seated, no less than ninety feet above the plain around. The uncovering of this mighty statue he would make the occasion of a grand festival, to be attended by all the dignitaries of the far-stretching empire.

It was quite in keeping with the ideas of antiquity that a new image of one of the national gods should be thus inaugurated, and that homage should be paid to it, as the

symbol of a particular deity. About five miles south-east of the ruins of the great city, on a part of the vast surrounding plain, seamed with traces of ancient canals, one of which is still known as the Dura, dotted with old mounds, Oppert found one mound known as "the squared," the corners of which face the four cardinal points, and rise twenty feet above the level below; each side, at the base, being almost exacty fifty-six feet long. On the top are four blocks of bricks, formerly parts of a united whole. The resemblance to the pedestal of a colossal statue is felt at once, and it would almost seem as if we had before us, in this platform, the site of the great image of which Daniel speaks.

To secure the grandeur of the inauguration ceremonies, a vast service of running posts was organised, and hurried off to every part of the empire, bearing the royal summons, in obedience to which, the magnificent satraps, their scarcely less imposing deputies, the gorgeously robed lieutenant-governors who served under them, the generals of all the army corps, the chancellors of provinces, the greater and lesser judges, the swarming hosts of civil and criminal lawyers, the magistrates of all grades, and the heads of sacred colleges,—in short, all the splendour and dignity of the empire,—were speedily in motion along every road, with their innumerable attendants, towards the capital. At last the great day arrived. The boundless plain was covered, far and near, with such a throng as had never, perhaps, been seen even at Babylon; Nebuchadnezzar, surrounded with his most glorious state, forming, no doubt, the central and overpowering sight of all.

Among the glittering suite attending him were, necessarily, the high officials of the court and, as part of

this honoured and envied throng, rode the three companions of Daniel, as high dignitaries of the college of astrologers and "wise men," attached to the palace; Daniel himself, strangely, not being mentioned as with them. In their bosoms alone the great spectacle of the day awoke no sympathy; for, to them, the shining statue of Merodach, which others regarded as a god, was only an abomination, which they would not recognise as worthy of common respect, even should their refusal to hail it as divine cost them their lives. They had, no doubt, talked and prayed over the matter, and their clear resolve had been taken, to keep clear of any approach to idolatry. Among all the myriads round, they, alone, had any such scruples; for was not Merodach proclaimed as, henceforth, the supreme god of Babylonia? Of course the multitude eagerly accepted him as such; for who were they, that they should dispute the voice of the Great King and of the sacred colleges?

But whatever others might think or do, was nothing to the friends of Daniel. They were bound to act according to their consciences. They were before Him to whom they must give account, and He was able to deliver them from the wrath of the king, for disobeying his command. The difficulty would have been less, had the refusal to worship the image been only a point of religious exactness. But in the eyes of that age it was far more; for to reject the religion of the state was to refuse obedience to the constituted authorities, and commit an audacious act of high treason.

But, now, gorgeous heralds rode out, and, after high flourishes of the trumpets, cried aloud that it was the king's command, that when the sacred choirs, gathered to

this grand solemnity from the great temples of all the gods, should raise the anthem to the mighty Merodach, amidst the music of the innumerable instruments brought together to honour the day, all nations and languages in the multitudes, far and near, around the resplendent image, should fall down and worship it, on pain of being cast, that same hour, in case of refusal, into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Forthwith, when the mighty strains arose, the vast sea of human beings bent, like a great wave, to the earth, the king at their head, and paid homage to the shining god.

It was noticed, however, that, amidst the worshippers, there were three figures, in the very neighbourhood of the king, who had remained erect, and had thus treated the royal command with disrespect. Who could they be? The keen ill-will of the "Chaldeans," whom the Hebrews had supplanted as chiefs of the royal magi, soon found out. They were their hated rivals. A word to the king would now free them for ever from them. Some of the offended caste lost no time, therefore, in turning informers, and bringing the audacious and insulting action of the three recusants before Nebuchadnezzar.

That any one should have dared to disobey him seemed incredible; but it was, if possible, still worse to affront his god. Breaking into a paroxysm of rage, wild and uncontrollable, he ordered the criminals to be brought before him instantly. "Would they bow down and worship the image, or not?" But their answer was ready. "We have no need," said they, "to answer thee, O king, in this matter. If our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us, He will deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known

unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Nothing like this had ever been heard in Babylonia. The most slavish, unlimited obedience to every least word of the king, was imperative on all, and rendered without a dream of hesitation. For was not the great king as one of the gods? And who would think of having a will other than his?

The whole being of the despot was turned to fury. He had been defied for the first time in his life; for the first time in his life, his pleasure had not been at once accepted as sacred law. There were great furnaces always burning in Babylon, to consume the corpses of the dead; one of these was to be heated seven times more than usual, or, rather, seven times more than was necessary, for its ordinary repulsive work, and into this the three offenders were to be cast; the strongest men in the king's guard being ordered to see the command carried out, as alone able to stand the terrible heat. The brave confessors had no time given them for preparation. There and then they were bound, as they stood, in their mantles, their hose, and their cloaks, and other garments, and thrown down, from above, into the awful sea of flame, the fierce tongues of which, leaping up, fatally burned the executioners. Meanwhile, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, though they had fallen bound into the roaring fires, to the amazement of all, were presently seen with their bonds loose, walking about, unhurt, in the midst of the fire. Still more, it was seen that a fourth form was with them, whom the "counsellors" sent to report, declared to be a "son of the gods," as if they fancied that the god of fire himself had come to protect them.

Such an amazing incident speedily reached the ears of the king, and brought him, in wondering excitement, to the spot. It was actually true. There was one portion in his empire, and that so near, in which his power was met and overthrown by a greater. Within the circle of the furnace into which he was now gazing, awestruck, another authority than his prevailed. Summoning them forth from their flaming prison, lest he might harm himself rather than them, since they clearly had a god as their helper, he could do no less than extol a Being who thus stood by His servants, and issue a decree that the God of these men should be recognised as divine in Babylonia. Promotion of the three noble confessors of their faith naturally followed; and, thus, out of the most awful danger came, to the faithful ones, not only well-won peace of soul, but earthly reward also, for their grand loyalty to the Eternal.

THE DEN OF LIONS.

DANIEL had been carried to Babylon, in B.C. 606, a rising youth. Since then, Nebuchadnezzar had reigned forty-five years, dying in 561. He had virtually created the Babylonian Empire, and he left it, at his death, an inheritance of unimaginable grandeur, stretching out, in the unclouded sunshine of universal peace, over vast realms, peopled by many widely different nations. It seemed as if Babylon would sit as queen over the habitable world through untold generations; and yet, in twenty-three years from the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the assaulting columns of Cyrus, then acting as commander-in-chief of Darius the Mede, marched in through the treacherously opened gates of the mighty city, and the sceptre passed into the hands of the conqueror.

Darius, a man of sixty-two, when Cyrus gained for him the throne of Nebuchadnezzar, was, however, little more than a phantom king; for he died childless, after two years, leaving the crown, with an undisputed succession, to Cyrus, who had not seized it before his death, to prevent the opposition of the Median army, till then the nominal head of the war. There is no mention of this Darius in ancient writers; and hence it has been urged, that he could only have been named, by mistake, for Darius Hystaspis, who reigned nearly twenty years later.

But we have simply to remember how the name of the great Assyrian king Sargon, who took Samaria, was known to us, till very recently, merely by one line in Isaiah,¹ and was hence fancied to be a historical slip of the prophet, and yet has been found, since the Nineveh mounds have been opened, to belong to one of the greatest monarchs of antiquity. How easily may the brief reign of Darius the Mede have similarly disappeared, at least for a time, so few notices of his age having survived.

Through all the interval from the days of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel had lived in Babylonia, and now, at the change of dynasty, was an old man of eighty, if not more. His fame, as the mouthpiece of the higher powers, must have been soon known to Darius; so that it is only what might have been expected when we read, that, on the division of the empire into a hundred and twenty provinces, by the new king, the prophet was appointed one of three sarekin, or presidents, to whom the superintendence of these was committed. It was inevitable, however, that the elevation of a foreigner, of a conquered race, to so high an honour, should rouse the jealousy of the native ruling class, and lead to a plot for his destruction. Intrigues and conspiracies have, in all ages, been part of the public and private life of the East, and in this case a ready pretext offered itself, in Daniel's disregard of the local gods. The priests and the laity alike, would applaud the overthrow of an enemy of Merodach or Bel. It was certain, moreover, that the prophet would refuse to allow any interference with his religion; so that, if his rivals could get the king to issue an order, obedience to which would require Daniel

¹ Isa. xx. 1.

to be disloyal to Jehovah, they might be sure they would be able to compromise him with Darius.

The snare was ere long skilfully woven out and laid. From the remotest ages, the kings of Babylon, like other kings of antiquity, generally, had claimed to be "sons of the great gods:" and it was, therefore, easy to obtain a decree from Darius, that all his subjects should be required to pray, for a month, to no other god but himself. Once signed, their prey was safe; for the insane pride of the Medo-Persian kings would not allow their cancelling any word they had made law, since their doing so would be an insinuation that, though divine, they might err,—a thought not to be tolerated for a moment.

Daniel, meanwhile, treated their scheme with perfect indifference. He knew that the God he served, who had delivered him from the greatest dangers in the past, was able to open a way to safety, for him, through his present perils. When, therefore, he heard that the decree had been signed, it made no change in his religious life. Going into his house as usual, at the hours of prayer, which in his case was three times a day, he flung open his window casements, as was his wont, and, "kneeling down upon his knees, prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime," with his face toward Jerusalem the seat of the temple, where Jehovah had, of old, been peculiarly present,—an attitude still observed by all Jews over the world; as all Mahommedans, in the same way, turn their face, in prayer, towards Mecca. In every synagogue, and in every mosque, moreover, there is always a mark in the wall showing the direction of the holy place.

It was enough. Daniel had disobeyed the decree, and it stood unalterably written, that any one who dared to do so, should, forthwith, be cast "into the den of lions." This was a punishment often used by the despots of Western Asia. Lions had, in former times, abounded in Mesopotamia ; for the old kings of Egypt, sixteen hundred years before Christ, have left records of their prowess in hunting them, in the regions bordering the Euphrates. In the later times of Darius, however, it would appear that numbers were kept in dens, in the palace grounds, ready to be turned out, when the great king was pleased to wish the excitement of the chase.

Darius now, for the first time, saw how he had been overreached ; but there was no human help for the victim of the plot. The grief of the king was deep and sincere, nor was he without hope, that a servant whom he honoured should, after all, pass through the awful ordeal safely. "Thy God whom thou servest continually," said he, to the grand Hebrew, "He will deliver thee." Such words must have sounded ominously to the accusers ; but they in their turn had no alternative but to carry out the king's written decree. They doubtless began to fear they had been too clever for their own good ; for, if the king's words proved true, and Daniel was really delivered from the lions by his God, Darius would certainly turn against them, and make them endure all they had contrived for the Hebrew.

It is not easy to understand what the "den" could have been. The word used for it is that used for a subterranean cistern, from the smooth sides and bottle-like top of which a wild beast could not escape, while a single large stone would suffice to seal the narrow mouth of it.

It must, however, have been of great size, for it held quite a crowd of victims, as we shall see, thrown into it the next day. Perhaps it was like a great underground reservoir I saw at Constantinople, dry ever since the Turks came, four hundred years ago, and now utilised, in a rough way, as a yarn-walk, by men who led out their woollen lines over the bottom, in spite of the mounds of rubbish that had lain all over it for centuries. Jeremiah tells of a "pit" large enough to hold the bodies of seventy men.¹ We have no description of the "dens" in which Oriental kings kept their wild animals, but a traveller in Morocco gives an account of one belonging to the sultan, which consisted of a square, underground pit, divided into two parts by a wall, in which was a door that could be opened and shut from above. Into each of these, in turn, the food of the beasts was thrown, the door being shut down behind them when they went after it; the half they left free being thus at the disposal of the keepers for cleaning. The "den" was open above, but bordered by a wall, over which one could look down at the monsters. Whatever the other arrangements, the mouth of the Persian "pit," by which, alone, escape was possible, was closed by a great stone, on which the impression of the signet-ring of Darius, and of the rings of his lords, was stamped, that there might be no change of purpose as to the fated prophet.

It was a dismal night for the king. Regret at his having let himself be tricked to destroy his best servant, indignation at those who had befooled him under pretext of zeal for the gods, and a faint hope that Daniel, in some mysterious way, might be delivered, drove sleep from him.

¹ Jer. xli. 7, 9.

But his fears proved unneeded, for, on rising at early morning, Daniel was found alive and unhurt! That he was at once drawn up and restored to favour, and that his accusers were hurled to destruction in his stead, was the natural close of the amazing incident.

THE PATRIARCH JOB.

THE Book of Job differs, in many of its characteristic features, from all the other books of Scripture. Neither the hero nor the subordinate personages introduced are Jews; and the scene of the incidents lies outside Palestine. The form of worship described in it is Gentile, not Jewish; for no mention of priests is made, and the father of the household offers the family sacrifices; nor is there in it, from beginning to end, any allusion to Jewish history or Jewish institutions. There is, moreover, an atmosphere of wide humanity in its treatment and spirit, unknown to the Jew; and there are frequent allusions to countries outside Palestine,—to the mining region of Sinai, for example, and to the exterminating wars of ancient Edom on the aboriginal Horites, and the varied wonders of the valley of the Nile. Its God is not distinctively the God of Israel; it knows nothing of a chosen people, and has no airs of superiority towards non-Jewish races.

Critics have discussed its age with wonderful acumen, examining its peculiarities of language, and every detail of its style and contents, with the result that, now, its date, with much confidence, is assigned to some period between the seventh and the fifth centuries before Christ; that is, between the time of Manasseh and Nehemiah. The story was probably an old-world tradition of the

East, and had been handed down, through many generations, before it was utilised by the author of the book, to enforce great lessons, on the moral government of the world by God. The Jews, I may say, speak of it as a mere poem. "Job did not exist," says the Talmud; "he was not a man, but a parable." It is not, however, necessary to think this, and Scripture appears to treat him as a real person. He is painted as one recognised by all as a man of exceptional excellence, and, at the same time, as widely famous for his wealth and worldly prosperity. With all this, his unaffected piety was universally acknowledged. "There was none like him upon earth,—a perfect and upright man, who feared God, and eschewed evil."

According to notions current among the Jews, the temporal good fortune of such a man was secure; but by thoughtful minds this had been felt to be contrary to experience. Job is, therefore, described in the book that bears his name as visited with every form of trouble, in spite of all his godliness; and the principle is urged, which received its final endorsement by our Saviour, when He asked if the men on whom the tower in Siloam fell were greater sinners than other men, or the Galileans slain by Pilate, when they were sacrificing at the temple, greater sinners than other Galileans,—questions which Christ answered in the strongest negative. This life, He in effect taught, is not a system of final rewards and punishments. Here we are disciplined, not paid for our merits, or scourged for our faults.

No doubt, a second moral is conveyed by the story, in its illustration of the characteristics of a heart loyal to God, when most severely tempted to lose its faith in Him. Through all despair and perplexity, the patriarch looks to

God as his hope and trust, till, at last, the clouds finally break, and he rejoices in the full justification of his constancy. Tempted by his wife to turn away from God, he rejects the thought.

Stripped of children and possessions, and even smitten by a loathsome disease, he is no longer fit to associate with men, and takes his seat outside the town, on the great dust-heap, which rises, like a small hill, at the gates of all Eastern villages. It is the haunt of the beggars and homeless of the community; the heat of the fermenting mass giving a sordid comfort through the cold nights. Here he is visited by three friends, who did not know him when they came, so utterly was everything changed. Weeping, rending their mantles, and sprinkling dust on their heads, toward heaven, they sit down, in silent grief, beside him. For seven days and nights they never speak a word to intrude on so great misery.

Then Eliphaz, the eldest and most weighty of his visitors, begins a discourse intended to show that all men are sinful, and that suffering is due to this, but may be removed by sincere repentance. He does not directly accuse the poor sufferer, but recalls the bitterness of the troubles that have overtaken him, and leaves him to say for himself, from what cause they could have been sent. Then, to soften the blow, he introduces, through the medium of a vision granted on some occasion to him, the universality of sin, which is found, he declares, not only in man, but even in higher orders of being. The burden of his address will be more readily caught from the following paraphrase of the fourth and fifth chapters, for which I am indebted to a distinguished living writer, and which runs thus:—

“My conscience compels me to say something to you. Might I venture to speak without your being vexed? How is it that you, who have so often comforted the distressed, are dismayed as soon as calamity comes upon yourself? Instead of despairing, you should remember that the innocent never perish. It is only the wicked who are consumed. . . . You need not be ashamed to own your sin, for all of us are sinners. This was revealed to me once in a vision. In the darkness of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, a fear came upon me and trembling, a wind swept over my face, and there stood before me a Presence, whose form I could not discern. It spoke in a clear soft voice, and asked, ‘Shall mortal man, who is sooner crushed than the moth, be pure in the sight of God his Maker, who chargeth even the angels with folly? It cannot be.’ Ask any of the holy ones themselves, and they will confirm my doctrine. . . .

“I have watched the wicked, and always found it ill with them. Their property is enjoyed by robbers. Their children ruin themselves with lawsuits. They themselves pass away prematurely. But this suffering is no accident. It is the punishment of sin. And, since all men are sinners, suffering must come, more or less, to all. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. Your grief is but an extreme illustration of the common rule. . . .

“Were I in your place, I would have recourse to God. Forgiveness and happiness may seem more than you can hope for; but God is always doing great things, past finding out. He is continually exalting those that are cast down. Happy is the man whom God correcteth. Despise not His chastening. It is for your good. His

purpose is to make you reflect. God only bruises that He may heal. Return to Him, and your prosperity will be restored,—nay, increased. In famine He will sustain you. In war He will protect you. You will laugh at all forms of danger. Wild beasts will never hurt you. Even the stones of the field will be in league with you, and, instead of obstructing your crops, will give them a more luxuriant growth. Your children will be multiplied as the very grass of the land. You shall go down to the tomb in a ripe old age, like a shock of corn fully ripe. This, Job, is my experience. Hear it, and learn it, for your good.”

Eliphaz illustrates the impossibility of those entering into the deep sorrows of others, who have not themselves passed through similar trials. The heart, says Luther, is the best theologian. The doctrine of the speaker was excellent in its way, and delicately put, but sympathy alone could abate the agony of Job’s bosom, and that Eliphaz could not fully give. We are made perfect by suffering, not only in our spiritual life, but in our capacity to succour those over whom the billows of suffering are at the moment breaking.

JOB AND HIS FRIENDS.

WHEN Eliphaz had ended his appeal to Job, the poor sufferer broke his silence, and began a formal reply, which extends through the sixth and seventh chapters. He had been sorely vexed, he said ; but his vexation had been as nothing compared to his calamity, which was heavier than the sands of the sea. The poisoned arrows of God were drinking up his life. But he had reason for his grief, for not even a beast cries out without cause. To tell him of death as awaiting him if he did not repent, was idle, for he longed for it above all things. Then he would have comfort, for he had never disobeyed the words of the Holy One. To talk of a happy future if he confessed, was vain. He had not the strength of stones and brass ; his life was broken.

Even the support he might justly claim from his friends was withheld. They had been like winter-torrents which run deep when not needed, but have dry beds in the time of heat. He had asked nothing, but looked assuredly for sympathy. Let them show him, in plain words, what he had done wrong. They accused him, but gave no proof of their charges. As to his passionate words, no one could lay stress on them ; for words were but wind, and despair like his could not restrain its cries.

In spite of them, he asserted his innocence. He knew right from wrong, and spoke thus from his heart. They

had painted God as a Father, but his experience was bitter. Like a slave under a taskmaster, panting for the night, man longed for death to end his misery. His own life was now unendurable in its wretchedness, and was hastening swiftly to its close, when he would pass into nothingness, like a cloud before the sun. Why should God torture so feeble a creature thus? Why should He keep watch over him every moment, to try him with fresh plagues? Grant that he had sinned; what harm could *he* do to God? Why cannot so great a Being pardon so frail a worm, who is so soon to mingle with the dust?

Bildad now begins, bluntly enough, with harsh reproof. When would Job give up his storm of angry words? Was God ever unjust? Would He have killed Job's children if they had not been sinners? They must have perished for their wickedness. As for Job himself, penitence would bring back prosperity. The fathers had rightly held that a hypocrite can no more prosper than a rush can grow without water. His ground of hope is frail as a spider's web. But if he turned to God, his sorrow would be changed to joy.

In chapters ix. and x., Job speaks again. Admitting the omnipotence of God and the hopelessness of contending with Him, he yet asserts that innocence makes no difference in the fate of men. God destroys alike the perfect and the wicked. He, himself, is assumed by his friends to be guilty, but he is not. Yet it would only make things worse if he tried to reason with the Almighty. He does not care whether he lives or dies. He will speak out, and ask God why He thus contends with him. Is it right to oppress the weak and to favour the wicked?

Innocence and sin are treated alike. Would he had never been born! Oh that God would let him alone, that he may have a little peace before he goes to the land from which there is no return,—the land of thick darkness!

Zophar now comes forward, simply repeating, that prosperity or suffering are meted out exactly in proportion to a man's innocence or sin. Job replies by a lengthened exaltation of the awful power of God, but he shows how far, in his opinion, the divine government is from being strictly retributive; that, in fact, it is either capricious and arbitrary, or beyond our comprehension. He will demand a formal trial, and claims to know of what he is accused. Receiving no answer, he sinks into his formal sadness. Yet, for a moment, he has the dim hope of a future life, but presently passes to his old despair, and sees in death only the end of conscious existence.

Eliphaz now, again,¹ appears,—only, however, to repeat his former doctrine of exact rewards and punishments in this life. Job hardly deigns to reply, but turns to God in mingled complaint and entreaty, illuminated by gleams of hope. Yet he closes by hailing death as his one great desire. Bildad then reappears, urging the orthodox idea of the time once more, with keen minuteness of home thrusts at the sufferer. Yes, punishment of sin is the explanation of all we endure in this life.

But Job will not admit that it is so. His miseries, he persists, are not a punishment for sin; though he does not pretend to know, how their infliction can be reconciled with the justice of the Almighty. Can his friends not show pity on him, and mitigate his wretchedness by a

¹ Job xv.

little human tenderness? But they remain silent, afraid to be sympathetic, lest it should appear as if they condoned his supposed heterodoxy. Deserted thus, his misery sinks still more deeply into his heart. It was clear that no light, to cheer his deep gloom, could be expected from any earthly source. Was it possible that, after all, the balance of his destiny would be restored hereafter, by a future life? Till now he had regarded death as the close of man's being; but how could it be so, since in no other way, apparently, than by the redressing of his miseries in a life to come, could the justice of God be vindicated?

Sitting on the dust-heap in unspeakable sorrow, he sees his friends wrapped in soothing self-complacency at their own prosperity: the proof that they were so much better than he, as not to have needed the infliction of his sufferings. Yet he feels that their lives, certainly, had not been better than his own. How could this be explained, unless there were a future life, in which that which was so mysterious now would be vindicated, and the justice of the Eternal be made clear? From this time his faith in immortality is fixed. "I should wish," says he, "that what I am about to speak were graven on the rocks, that it might be read for ever. I know that there lives for me an Avenger, and that, by and by, He will stand over my grave, and pronounce my cause just. My body will be destroyed, but, without it, I shall see God. Yes, I myself shall see Him. As for you, O friends! if you persist in persecuting me, beware of the sword of my Avenger, my Vindicator."

Zophar now takes up the discourse, hurling still more bitter reproaches upon Job for his obstinate heterodoxy.

But the patriarch stubbornly maintains that he is innocent, and clings to his faith in a future vindication, more tenaciously than ever. He will live beyond the grave, and there all will be put right.

Eliphaz once more retorts fiercely. But it is of no use. Job holds fast to his trust in the final justification of the divine ways, in the life beyond. "Even to-day," says he, "after all your hard speeches, I persist in my complaint; yet, bitterly though I groan, it does not express the depth of my grief. Oh that I knew where I might find God! I would go even to His throne, and lay my cause before Him, and advance argument on argument, that I might hear what He should say in reply. Then, at last, I should understand what He has to urge against me. I am not afraid of His using His great power to put me down. No; let Him but Himself attend to my case, and not confuse it with your blind talk. Then would there be a righteous man disputing with Him, and I should be delivered for ever by my Judge, and fully acquitted. The trouble is, I know not where to find Him. If I go east, He is not there; if I go west, I cannot perceive Him; if I go to the north, where He is working, I cannot behold Him; if I go south, He hides Himself, so that I cannot see Him. But He knows my life. My foot has walked in His ways. I have kept to them, and not turned aside. I have obeyed His commands. I have set His will before my own. When He does put me to trial, I shall come forth as gold. Meanwhile His purpose must be carried out. I must wait His time. What He wills, He always performs. The thought of this overcomes me, but I trust in Him, and the end will declare my innocence and vindicate all His ways."

JOB'S REPLY.

STRONG in his integrity, yet unchanged in his loyal conviction that God must be just, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, Job, after maintaining his belief that he would be cleared by the Eternal, if he could secure a trial before Him, continues the illustration of his contention, that wickedness is far from always meeting due punishment in this world.¹ He wonders why the ways of Providence are not justified to faithful souls, by their being allowed to *see* their vindication. Why does God not fix days on which His judgments are publicly disclosed? For undoubtedly wickedness does, apparently, go unpunished in many cases. The poor, and even the widow, are plundered. They are so stripped, indeed, that they have to flee to the desert, to live on roots and the like, as if they were beasts. Or they are kept as slaves, without even clothes being given them to cover them from the storm. Murderers and robbers flourish. Their name and heritage may suffer after their death, but during life they are "exalted."

All this cannot be denied, and hence Bildad, who next speaks, no longer assails Job with accusations, but contents himself with repeating that the distance between God and man involves impurity in all, so that Job is wrong in expecting or claiming acquittal. Job, in reply,

¹ Job xxiv.

while maintaining his integrity, freely assents to all that has been said of the majesty of God, but adds that, after all, we see but "the outskirts" of His ways. We catch a whisper of His plans, but the thunder of His power, in its full sway, is overwhelming, and beyond our faculties to understand.¹

From the twenty-seventh to the thirty-first chapters the suffering patriarch continues to soliloquise on the whole question at issue, as if unconscious of the presence of his friends. He admits that he has stated his belief in the good fortune of the wicked too broadly. On reflection, he must admit that the wicked are punished in many cases. But this leaves the mystery of his own case unsolved; for he is not wicked, and yet has been sorely stricken. His friends, in fact, had been trying to explain the inexplicable. Nor should this seem strange; for man has only limited faculties, and much, even in the world around, is beyond his comprehension. Nothing, for example, is more astonishing, Job thinks, than the way in which the precious metals are brought from the depths of the hills by the miner,² and yet how little of the secrets of nature is made known even in such triumphs as this! Though we can thus pluck their secret from the bosom of the mountains, a glance at nature will show how utterly "past finding out" are "the ways of God."

He now³ breaks off wearisome argument, to indulge in pensive retrospect. His thoughts go back to his prosperous past. The friendship of God, in those days of his "ripeness," watched over his tent, and his children were about him. He lived outside a well-ordered city, but not far from it. When he went, out of

¹ Job xxvi.

² Job xxviii.

³ Job xxix.

his encampment-gate, to the town, and sat down in the open space before it, where the citizens gathered for business or gossip, he was treated with the most touching respect by all, from the youngest to the oldest, and from the poorest to the highest. He was, moreover, a judge sitting at the gate, and had earned the blessing of every class by his fearless punishment of the oppressor, however strong, and the vindication of the weak. Rich, and yet nobly upright and liberal, he dwelt "as a king" in his home.

But, now, the lowest affected to despise him. Even the sons of the tribes, dispossessed by his stronger race, and driven to the wilderness, to feed on salt-wort and broom-roots, and to live in caves and holes of the rocks,—wretched beings who had been scourged out of the land,—made him their song and byword, and even insulted him by spitting in his face. They were glad to repay on the sheik of their conquerors some of their cherished hatred. Nor was this all. His disease made life a burden.

Yet what had his life been? Did he not weep for any in trouble? Was he not grieved for the poor? He was chaste even in the indulgence of his eyes; he was never guilty of any impurity; the cause of any, even of his slaves, man or woman, was treated with absolute integrity; he had fed the hungry and clothed the naked; he had never made money his passion; he had never denied God by worshipping the sun or moon, as those round him did; he had never injured his enemy or rejoiced at his calamity; though cursing a foe was so universal in the land, he had never done so; his house had always been

open to the wayfarer; he had not even cherished sinful thoughts, in lack of power to vent his anger at the threatened vengeance of unfortunates who had suffered at his hand. Yet here was he, weighed down by troubles beyond any man.

The long speech of Elihu, which extends from the thirty-second to the thirty-eighth chapter, is regarded by some of the critics as an interpolation of a later period. Without giving an opinion on this, we may pass it over as only an interruption to the flow of the narrative.

Meanwhile, Job has lost the passionate intensity of his earlier frame of mind. He has come to the conviction that there is a life beyond this, and hence feels that, at least after death, all will be explained. Still, it is hard to suffer in the present world, when conscious that one has striven to serve and honour God. Like all the men of his day, he can think of suffering only as punishment, and would fain know why it fell on him, of all people, so heavily. Would that God Himself would explain the mystery! He has, at least, forgotten him. There can hardly be injustice or cruelty in the Eternal; yet how are things to be viewed, so that He may be finally cleared from even the subdued thought, of being the Author of unfairness?

But now, by a grand conception, God is introduced as listening to His servant's cry, and deigning to address him from the midst of a wild tempest; the fit approach of Him whose "way is in the whirlwind and the storm." The awful words sound nearly as follows: "Who is this that adds confusion to his high theme by foolish words? Thou hast asked to meet Me; prepare to do so. Where wast thou when I founded the earth? Say, if thou

knowest. Who measured out its parts? On what does it rest? Who laid its cornerstone, when the other races of the universe shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea in its appointed bounds, making clouds its veil, and mists the swaddling-bands of its infancy? Hast thou ever controlled the rising of the day,—that supreme wonder of nature? Hast thou found out the secret fountain of the ocean, or explored the abyss of its depths? Have the gates of the pale kingdoms of the dead been opened to thee? Hast thou explored the wide breadth of the earth? Where does light dwell, and where darkness? Hast thou entered the storehouse of the snow or of the hail? How are the light and the winds sent on their missions? Who sends out the rainstorm, and makes a path for the lightning? Do you know the father of the rain, or of the dew-drops? or the mother of the ice and hoarfrost? Canst thou bind into their places the seven stars, or loosen Orion's belt? or make the constellations appear in their season? or guide the Bear and her sons?

“Turn now to the creatures of the earth. Canst thou find prey for the lion? or provide food for the young ravens? or tell all about the wild goat? Who made the wild ass so untamable in his wilderness? Can you make a docile slave of the wild ox? Why is the stork so kind to its young, and the ostrich so careless of hers? Dost thou give its strength to the horse? Hast thou clothed him with his quivering mane? . . . Did your cleverness teach the hawk to fly south in winter, or the eagle to build on the lofty crags?” But now the Almighty is represented as stopping to ask if Job, who has reproved Him, still wishes to contend with Him.

But the patriarch is not yet silenced; he tells God he is too weak to answer. He will say no more. He is passive, however, rather than satisfied. Once more, therefore, Jehovah speaks. Job is asked to put himself on a level with Him by exhibiting the same powers. Men catch and hold the mighty hippopotamus, because He has ordained that it should be so. But they can do nothing with the crocodile, because a different nature has been given him. "And, this being so, wilt thou stand up against me, His maker, to whom all that is under the whole heaven belongs?"

Now, at last, Job is meekly submissive. "I know," says he, "that Thou canst do all things, and that nothing is too hard for Thee. Thou saidst, 'Who is this that is darkening the divine counsels with foolish words?' I confess that I have spoken of things I did not understand. I had only heard of Thee, when I rashly proposed to put Thee to the question; but now that my eyes see Thee I retract my audacity, and repent in dust and ashes." He does not admit any want of integrity. Between himself and his fellow-man, he could still claim to be more righteous than they. But he now realised, in a measure, that, though free from blame towards men, he could not dare to take the same position towards God. For God was not only wiser, but holier, than any of His creatures; and it was nobler and better to trust Him, in even the sorest difficulties, than to look to our own human reason for a solution.

The end of the narrative does not require lengthened notice. The loyalty that stood true to God amidst all doubts was acknowledged by him, and the night of sorrow passed into the brightness of a morning without clouds;

Job's prosperity in his old age justifying him in his steadfast assurance, that we cannot judge of God's heart by His hand, and that the sufferings of men in this life are no measure of their goodness or the reverse. Christ's doctrine, illustrated by His reference to those killed by the tower at Siloam, was, in fact, anticipated by the lesson of the narrative of the sufferer.

SELECTIONS FROM THE PSALMS.

THE FIRST PSALM.

THE First Psalm, over which no name of an author is inscribed, stands most fitly in the place it holds, as a brief preface or introduction to the great collection of hymns of the ancient Church, known to us as the Psalter. No one can tell to whom we are indebted for it. The sweet song remains with us; but the singer, like so many others to whom the world is debtor, has left no trace of his name or story. Even the age in which he lived is conjectural; for while some fancy him to have played his part in the great days of the Maccabees, in the second century before Christ, others think he may have lived in the last age of the kingdom of Judah, before Jeremiah's time, or even in some earlier period, after that of Solomon.

It matters nothing, however, when or by whom these sweet verses were written; they are an everlasting joy to all humble souls striving towards the heavens, through many slips and frequent stumblings, in the darkness of temptation, doubt, and depression.

In verse 1 the word "blessed" has, as its fundamental idea, the going straight forward, without stop or falling, than which no conception of happiness could be more

perfect. The root-verb is translated in Proverbs (xxiii. 19) "guide thine heart," and in Isaiah (iii. 12) "they who lead thee;" (ix. 16) "the leaders" and ("they that are) led of them." Crooked paths are a fitting symbol of misfortune; a straight path is a fine emblem of peace and joy. "Counsel" is rendered elsewhere, (1 Chronicles xii. 19), "advisement;" (2 Chronicles x.) "advice;" (Ezra iv. 5) "purpose;" thus pointing to a person who has made himself one with unworthy company, follows their ideas, and lives their life.

"The wicked," in the first meaning of the word, are those who cause disturbance, in their fancied enjoyments, or in their brawls, and wrong-doing, in contrast to the quiet and gentleness of good men; but, with this, all forms of evil are included. It is hence, in different texts, used for violence, impiety, the getting money otherwise than uprightly, and the using unjust balances. It implies, in fact, that whatever is not right, in the strictest sense, must be wrong. The word rendered "stands" is found often in the sense of "remaining" or "staying" in a place or a condition, but also in that of "persisting," in a course. Thus we read, "Stand not [that is, 'persevere not'] in an evil thing."¹

"The scornful," are those who ridicule and mock the commands and duties of religion, natural affection, or ordinary morals. The same word occurs in the verse "Fools make a mock at sin,"² and in the words "Be ye not mockers."³ An old proverb speaks of "the fuller's hand being subdued to that he works in,"—that is, taking the colour of the dye in which it is busy; and another tells us that "company makes kindred." "If you don't want

¹ Eccles. viii. 3.² Prov. xiv. 9.³ Isaiah xxviii. 22.

to sound the bell," says a third, "don't handle the rope." The young moth, we are told, was counselled by its mother to keep even from the smoke of the lamp, if it would make sure against the flame. "First walking, then standing, then sitting," says an old writer; "little at first, everything at last."

The word "to meditate" means, primarily, in Hebrew, to speak with one's self in a low, murmuring voice, as is natural when our mind is deeply occupied with any matter. But meditating or thinking on God's law may be very useless, as well as most profitable. All depends on whether we occupy ourselves with the husk or the kernel,—the words only, or the spirit. The rabbis, in old times, pondered over the law, literally, day and night; but all that too many got from it was a wondrous subtilty of word-splitting casuistry and wire-drawn trifling. I have known great theologians who were very poor Christians. But the humble soul, which desires to know its duty that it may perform it, and seeks the comforts of the promises, to enable it to brave whatever may lie in the way, is rewarded richly.

In the East, the limits of irrigation are those of vegetable life. The yellow, barren desert presses up in Egypt, to the very side of the last rivulet of water led over the soil, from the Nile; and in a garden neither tree nor shrub can grow, unless a life-giving ripple of water be led, day by day, to its roots. On the plain near Joppa one hears the sound of the water-wheels always raising water to pour into troughs, from which threads of it are led off to the root of each orange-tree in the wide plantations of that fruit. Fed thus, they bring forth their fruit in its season, and their leaves

are always fresh and green. So, implies the psalm, the living water of heavenly influence, drawn from God's law, secures the well-being of the godly; or, as the apostle has it, godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come,—which, indeed, rightly understood, is true.

A religious man, in the true sense, develops, in being so, a character in which lie the elements of worldly prosperity, other things being equal. But religion will not supply the want of business qualities of an ordinary, practical kind; and, in the absence of these, success cannot be expected. No man, however religious, could be a buyer of different shades of silk, if he had colour-blindness. Yet, pray, don't think that religion can be regarded, in any case, as worth having simply as an investment. The worth of our conduct depends on its motive, and to be godly for gain shows that we are not godly at all. The chaff from the open-air threshing-floors of the East, which are often on hill-tops, is whirled away by the wind,—a terrible image when the wicked are compared to it. The end of the psalm is thus as cheering to the lowly in heart, as it is dreadful to those who think they can live without God.

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THE SECOND PSALM.

THE Second Psalm, like the first, has no superscription, assigning it, even conjecturally, to any particular author; and the critics have, hence, had an opportunity of proposing the most varied theories as to its date and its composer. Some have fancied it a psalm of David; others have assigned it to Solomon, Nathan the prophet, Isaiah, Hezekiah, or the Maccabæan king Alexander Jannæos, who died only about eighty years before the birth of Christ; so that there is a difference of well-nigh a thousand years, between the earliest and the latest period credited with its production.

One might fancy, however, that it comes to us from Solomon's time, if any weight can be put on its applicability to that day; though there may have been other times, which, did we know more, it would suit as closely. In the opening of Solomon's reign, however, we may imagine a movement, on the part of the subject kings of his empire, to break off the yoke David had imposed on them, and can readily think of it as at once crushed, by the energy and skill of the young king. Certainly we know of no projected rising of the nations against David; and, moreover, he was anointed at Bethlehem, not in Zion, where Solomon, apparently, was consecrated, as David's successor. The style of the Hebrew has been thought to mark the Solomonic age, and thus, on different

grounds, this time, as justly as any other, may be fancied the right one.

By the "nations" in the first verse, called *goin* in the Hebrew text, were meant any except the people of Israel; so that the expression is equivalent to "the Gentiles," or outside heathen populations, and to "the peoples" of the second clause. Tidal, the confederate of Chedorlaomer, is called "the king of the Goim;"¹ and we find the same title given in Joshua² to a petty ruler of a portion of the Holy Land, either Gilgal, or, as some think, Galilee, which is called in Isaiah,³ also Galilee of the Goim, or nations. In the same way, "Leummim," the word translated "peoples," is used in Genesis⁴ for an Arab tribe, descended from Abraham; and thus the limited meaning attached to these two words help us to measure the force of the expressions, in verse 2, about "the kings of the earth."

The word "messiah" in that verse, translated "anointed," is used habitually of the Jewish kings, as consecrated to their office by anointing, and therefore most sacred. Thus Saul is called God's "messiah,"⁵ and so is David;⁶ so also, is the Jewish king, generally, as such;⁷ and it is used of Cyrus, King of Persia, by Isaiah: "Thus saith Jehovah to his messiah, to Cyrus."⁸ Priests also received the same name, as when we read of the high-priest as "the priest, the messiah;" that is, anointed.⁹ In verse 6 the word translated "set" in the Authorised Version, and "anointed" in that which I have given, is thus rendered in the margin, its meaning being "to pour," or

¹ Gen. xiv. 1.

² Josh. xii. 23.

³ Isa. ix. 1.

⁴ Gen. xxv. 3.

⁵ 1 Sam. xii. 3, 5; xxiv. 6, 10; xxvi. 9, 11, 23; 2 Sam. i. 14, 16.

⁶ 2 Sam. xix. 21; xxiii. 1; Ps. xviii. 50.

⁷ Ps. xx. 6; xxviii. 8.

⁸ Isa. xlv. 1.

⁹ Lev. iv. 3, 5, 16; vi. 22.

“pour out,” whether libations to God,¹ or molten metal in casting an idol or other object,² or the oil of consecration, on a king, or on the “Dukes of Gihon,” the “princes” of the Palestine nations assailing Israel, or the “princes” of the “king of the north;” that is, of the Græco-Syrian dynasty.³

In verse 7 the word translated “begotten” means, evidently, “created as king” — appointed, constituted, made to begin, as such. It cannot mean that he was born on that day; for it speaks of him as installed on it as the Anointed, reigning far and near, under Jehovah, who, having consecrated, would defend him. The wondrous honour of being named his Son, by God, though applied to our Lord in a sense altogether different from that in which it was ever used of any other, is not uncommon in the Old Testament. Thus we read of “the sons of God.”⁴ In the Psalms (lxxxvi. 6) we read, “I have said, Ye are Gods (O ye kings), and all of you sons of the Most High.” In another Psalm (lxxxix. 27) it is said of “David,” whom God had “anointed with His holy oil” (v. 20), “I will make him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth.” I do not quote this with reference to its higher bearing to a greater than David, but only to show the idea attached to a Jewish king, as made a “son of God” by the lofty consecration of his anointings, which constituted him, as we have seen, “God’s messiah.” Nathan, sent by God, tells David (in 2 Sam. vii. 14) that God will be a father to Solomon, and that Solomon will be His son, which would be a striking sidelight on our psalm if we regard it as spoken

¹ Hos. ix. 4.

² Josh. xiii. 21; Ps. lxxxiii. 11; Dan. xi. 8.

³ Isa. xl. 19; xliv. 10.

⁴ Gen. vi. 2, 4.

originally by that king, or in his name. The Hebrew nation, also, is often honoured by the title of God's son, as in Exodus (iv. 22), "Israel is my son, my firstborn." "Is Ephraim," asks Jehovah, "my dear son? Is he a pleasant child?" literally "a son of caresses."

The fierce language of verse 9, in which the heathen nations over which "the messiah Son" is appointed as king, will be shattered by Him with His iron mace, and dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel, shows the difference between the Old Testament and the New. Very different is the language of Isaiah, applicable to the Messiah in the highest sense of the word. "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, for He has anointed me (literally, "made me Messiah") to preach good tidings unto the meek: He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," reserving His wrath for the tyrants who held His people in bonds and oppressed them¹

The mace wielded by the Son, in our psalm, was a war-club, in this case of iron, or with an iron head, often spiked, and always much heavier than the stalk. With this, the warrior, in his wild fury of battle, crushed-in the skulls of as many of his so-called "enemies" as he could. Its use is mentioned again in one of the Psalms (cx. 6), in which Jehovah, at the right hand of the Jewish king in battle, to secure him victory, will, we are told, "smite in pieces the heads (of his—the king's—foes) over a wide country,"—for this is the literal rendering. Pottery in the East is not tempered as it is with us, and hence breaks so easily that it is very difficult, as I have

¹ Isa. lxi. 1.

found, to bring home specimens without their going to pieces. Near Memphis, and on the slopes of Gerar, among other spots too numerous to recall, the quantity of broken pottery strewing the ground is beyond conception till seen; and there is a place near the wall of Jerusalem where, one may say, there are quarries of fragments of every kind of clay vessel. To break such things in pieces is equivalent to a vivid image of utter destruction.

THE NINETEENTH PSALM.

THE Nineteenth Psalm is dedicated, in the inscription, "To the Chief Musician," and is called "A Psalm of David." There is a hint in a text in Chronicles¹ as to the nature of the office of the choir-master thus mentioned: "And Mattithiah, . . . with harps, on the Sheminith, to excel,"—words used in all their unmeaningness by the translators, from their not knowing the force of the Hebrew expressions, in this instance, which are clearer to us after centuries of progress in philological study. In plain English they mean that "Mattithiah" and his fellow-choristers "played on harps in the octave (that is, in the bass), to lead the song." Hence the words before our psalm are an instruction that it is to be performed under the direction of the official who thus leads the music, which, as the verse of Chronicles before that quoted tells us, included also "psalteries"—a kind of stringed instrument, apparently more or less like our guitar—"on Alamoth," or, "after the manner of virgins," or soprano; so that the temple had part-singing in some degree, accompanied by arranged instrumental aid.

That the name of David should have been given as author of the psalm, has not hindered many different opinions respecting its age and composition; for the titles in the Psalter must have been largely conjectural, since

¹ 1 Chron. xv. 21.

they seem to have been added long after the return from Babylon.

Most scholars have fancied our psalm made up of two parts: one reaching to the end of the sixth verse, and forming a fragment of a longer ode, of which the rest is now lost; the other dating from a much later period, and embracing the rest of the psalm. But in the case of this lyric, as in that of the other psalms, the dates proposed vary so greatly, that it is impossible to regard the whole as more than so many unauthoritative guesses.

Looking up to the calm, clear Syrian sky, which knows no clouds for months each year, the testimony it bears, alike by day and night, to the majesty of God,—here called by the ancient name El, “the Mighty One,”—speaks out to the heart of the poet, till he pours forth his soul in a lofty expression of emotion.

The sun is poetically compared to a bridegroom, who, after resting through the night in his marriage chamber, comes forth rejoicing, at dawn, to run his course. The Hebrews fancied that at his going down, the orb of day began an unseen return, under the earth, to the point from which he sets forth each morning.¹ The voice of the heavens is inaudible by the outer senses, but speaks sublimely in lessons to the soul.

The different names given to the “law” are striking. It is called “the testimony,” “the statutes,” “the commandment,” “the fear,” and the “ordinances,” “of Jehovah,”—a copiousness of reverence which seems to point, for the date of the second part of the psalm, to the later age, in which the study of the law, during and after the return,

¹ Eccles. i. 5.

had become the one engrossing conception of religion to the Jews.

In the tenth verse the word *debash*, translated "honey," means, also, the sweet syrup of grapes, which is much esteemed in the East. The juice is boiled down to a half or a third, and forms, at this day, an article of export from Palestine to Egypt, as well as a much-prized condiment in the Holy Land. Perhaps it is well to understand this as meant, in the first of the two clauses, since the honey of bees, dropping from the comb, is mentioned in the second.

It is very striking to notice the difference between the earlier ages of Jewish history and those after the exile to the Euphrates, in the prominence assigned in them, respectively, to the "law." From many incidental expressions in the earlier prophets, we see that it was more or less known to them; and the temple service from the time of Solomon, like that of the new tabernacle, under David, in Jerusalem, was copied from the tabernacle service of Shiloh and the wilderness. But, while some faithful souls thus preserved their reverence for the sacred writings of the nation, how completely must they have fallen into neglect, and how entirely must the knowledge of their contents have been derived from oral tradition, to account for the excitement of Josiah and his age, at the discovery of a written copy of "a roll of the law of Jehovah, given by Moses"¹ in some lumber-room of the temple, where it had lain unnoticed so long that its contents, when read, startled both king and priests, as a voice from heaven, of which, till then, they had known virtually nothing.

¹ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14.

But if the sacred writings of the Hebrews had been allowed to fall into virtual oblivion during the later ages of the monarchy, the devotion to them from the time of Josiah was so intense as, in the end, to become a slavish and superstitious worship of even their smallest letter, to the overlooking, in a sad degree, of their spiritual meaning. Even in those days, however, of bigoted concentration on the external worship of the sacred words, there must always have been some who, like the author of our psalm, honoured them for their spiritual worth. To them the law was a light to the feet and a lamp to the path,¹—a metaphor striking even to us, but much more so in the East, where the traveller by night holds a lamp, hung from a cord, close down to the ground, before his footsteps, to show the roughnesses of an Oriental track. “Perfect,” “trustworthy,” as that is on which we may safely lean for support; “righteous,” “pure,” “holy,” “true and righteous from beginning to end,”—the law of God is indeed, when studied by a humble, loving spirit, better than much fine gold, and sweeter than the honey that drops from the honeycomb.

¹ Ps. cxix. 105.

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

THE Twenty-third Psalm, like almost every other in the Psalter, has been ascribed to very various authors and ages. Though there seems no good reason for questioning the inscription which assigns it to David, it has been attributed, in turns, to Jeremiah, to the time of Nehemiah, to the age of the Maccabees, and, more vaguely, to some hero, who, after suffering much privation, is cheered and comforted by a full and rich supply for all his wants. I mention this curious instance of difference of opinions to show how arbitrary all theories about the age of any special portion of Scripture poetry, in a collection like the Psalter, must be. The mention of the house of the Lord in the last verse has been thought to point to a later date than David, since the temple was not built when he died; but we find this name given to the tabernacle in Exodus (xxiii. 19, xxxiv. 26); Deuteronomy (xxiii. 18); Joshua (vi. 24); 1 Samuel (i. 7), and elsewhere, so that David might well have used it of the tabernacle he had raised in Jerusalem.

We may therefore, with no misgivings, regard it as indeed a remembrance of the hero-king of Israel, and may fancy it composed in the calm closing days of his life, when he had passed through his last and greatest peril,—the rebellion of Absalom. Looking over the strange and mingled past, his thoughts go back to the

early days when he was leading his father's sheep over the bare hills, east and south of Bethlehem, where the wandering Arab still roams, in the hope of finding a spot of green in some gorge, where the glow of the sun has not yet scorched all vegetation from the ground; and where some hollow in the bed of a winter torrent may still afford a little water for the thirsty sheep and goats. The life of a shepherd is lonely and humble enough in the most civilised country and in the richest pasture-land; but it is indescribably unattractive, according to our ideas, in such regions as invited a Bethlehem shepherd.

Still, it is the mind that makes the landscape, and a soul like that of David, communing with nature, around and over him, in all the wondrous phenomena of day and night, would find it rich in a thousand reflections and lessons, of which a common shepherd would have had no faintest thought.

Shepherds in Palestine live with their charge, of which the larger part is generally goats, at some seasons, both day and night, sleeping and finding shelter for their flock in the darkness of some cave; for in the limestone hills of the Holy Land, caves abound everywhere. Hence they wander far afield, which, in Southern Judah, means through very rough country. East and south of Bethlehem the surface of the uplands is worn into countless deep and often narrow ravines, and is, moreover, rent by innumerable cracks and fissures, often of great depth, though so narrow that one does not see them till almost at their edge. Through the gloomy depths of such awful clefts, David must often have led his charge when a shepherd, and might well think them only to be compared, for their gloom, to the darkness of death. The

glare of the sun never penetrated such profound rents in the hills ; and they were, hence, the natural haunt of the wild beast, the snake, and the still more dangerous human foe, intent on robbery and violence. But through even such chasms, says the psalm, God had led and would lead the singer, as he guided his flock, in their darkness, to some well-known spot beyond, where water and food could be expected.

The landscape sinks to the east, towards the Dead Sea, in successive gigantic steps of white or yellow limestone, from which the sunshine is reflected with a blinding splendour. Springs are well-nigh unknown, and the pools left by the heavy winter rains, in shady hollows, are soon dried up, except in rare spots, which the sun has been unable to reach. A small pool in such a region would indeed be "water of rest," as the Hebrew has it. We must not, however, apply our Western standard of water supply, or of pasture, to the East. Any water at all is something for a poet to make a subject of excited verse ; and, as to pasture, he will write an ode on a spot which we should think miserably stony and wretched, as if it were a very garden of Eden. Green pastures which would delight a poor shepherd of Palestine, would not be looked at by our well-fed sheep. Indeed, it has often been a wonder to me how the Palestine sheep and goats kept soul and body together, on what passes in these parts for grazing land.

Dr. Duff, the Indian missionary, used to explain the use of the two words "rod" and "staff," by his noticing a shepherd put the crook at the end of his staff, round the leg of a lamb which had ventured into a dangerous place, and thus help it up to safety ; while his rod was a stout,

club-like stick, with which to drive off any wild animal that might seek to harm one of his flock. Coleridge says, finely, that God's rod and His staff both comfort us ; that is, both His chastisements and His favours.

One can fancy David seen by his pursuers, in the bitter days of Saul's fury against him, eating his humble meal in perfect security, on the farther side of some narrow but impassable cleft, needing a circuit of miles before any one could get near him. This would indeed be a table spread before him, in presence of his enemies.

To dwell in the "House of the Lord," that is, to be able to resort continually to His temple, or tabernacle, was, in old times, a matter of supreme importance, as such a building was regarded as really the house of the Deity, where alone He could be closely approached. Hence David was in great trouble when forced to live for a time in Moab, because it not only kept him far from the seat of his God, at Jerusalem, but made him be in the territory of another god, who might be offended by a stranger doing homage to any divinity but himself, in his own domain.

This lovely psalm was the last portion of Scripture on the lips of that noble man of God, Edward Irving ; and surely, if ever saint leaned on the arm of the eternal Father as he passed through the dark valley, it was he. Nor has its sweet word been dear to him alone. Many a child of God has found strong support in its still small voice of divine pity and love.

THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM.

THE superscription of the Fifty-first Psalm assigns this noble religious hymn to David, and supposes it to have been written after his terrible sin with Bathsheba. There is, indeed, much in the psalm that seems to justify this; for, like David, its author has been guilty of murder (v. 14); and, like him, he is deeply penitent.

In the eighteenth verse, however, God is entreated to build the walls of Jerusalem, which seems to point to a later period; for Jerusalem had just been taken, in David's day, and the Jebusite walls had not been injured. Nor is there any allusion, in Scripture, to any building or repairing of town walls by the great king. The walls, were, however, partly thrown down in the reign of Amaziah;¹ and when dilapidated at a later time, they were repaired by Hezekiah,² as they had been by Uzziah and Jotham, after the death of Amaziah.³ After the great siege by Nebuchadnezzar, the whole wall was levelled, and lay thus, till a new wall was raised, after Nehemiah's arrival, nearly a century later. But this wall was again thrown down by Antiochus Epiphanes, B.C. 168.⁴

It appears, moreover, as if the public sacrifices had been suspended when the psalm was written,⁵ a state of

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 13.

² 2 Chron. xxxii. 5.

³ 2 Chron. xxvi. 9; xxvii. 3.

⁴ 1 Macc. i. 33.

⁵ Ps. li. 19.

things that could not apply to the time of David. As, therefore, it does not lessen the value of the psalm, even if it be the production of some one else than David, it is, perhaps, the safer course to leave the authorship to each one's judgment. Some hold it as the composition of David; others assign it to the time of the Exile, or that of Nehemiah, or even of the Maccabees. But, in any case, it is a grand confession of sin and broken-hearted penitence, of priceless worth to all heavy-laden spirits. Our English version is very fine, needing very few emendations.

The name "Elohim," as that of God, is used in the Psalms about three hundred and sixty times, that of "Jehovah" about five hundred and fifty times; but "Adonai" (used in verse 15) occurs hardly more than fifty times; and, as seems strange, "Jehovah" is not used in this psalm at all. Does this show that the psalm was written in the late period of the Jewish Church, when the word "Jehovah" was beginning to be thought too sacred to be written, and "Adonai" was coming into use in its place? "Tender mercies" (v. 1) mean, literally, "bowels;" the lower part of the body being regarded by the Hebrews as the seat of the emotions. Thus it is said of the woman who appealed to Solomon, that "her bowels yearned upon her son;"¹ and the same idea is repeated in various passages in different portions of the New Testament;² the Greek word being euphemised in not a few cases, in the authorised translation.

The word "transgression" (v. 1) means "to break one's allegiance, to rebel, to revolt." Thus³ it is said "Moab

¹ 1 Kings iii. 26.

² 2 Cor. vi. 12; Phil. i. 8, ii. 1; Col. iii. 12.

³ 2 Kings i. 1.

rebelled against Israel." "Blot out" means to wipe off so completely that no trace shall remain,—as when it is said¹ "Thou hast put out their name for ever and ever," or² "The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." In verse 2, "wash me" is the word used for cleansing any garment by treading it in a tub or trough, as fullers do. It is thus stronger than the word to lave or wash the body, and is hence used always of the washing the dress of the priests, from the drench of blood with which it must have been soaked. "Cleanse me" is the word used for being pronounced Levitically clean, and means here a cleansing in a moral sense; not merely external.

As the child of sinful man, the Psalmist feels, like Job, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."³ The plant intended in the Bible by "Hyssop" (v. 7) has not been identified; but, whatever it was, it was commanded to be used in Egypt, in sprinkling the blood of the Passover lamb on the Jewish lintels and doorposts, that the angel of death might pass by the dwellings thus marked.⁴ The blood of the birds, moreover, offered at the purification of a leper, was sprinkled on the now restored man from a bunch of hyssop;⁵ and the house cleansed from leprosy was, in the same way, sprinkled with blood, by a similar bunch of the plant. The sacrifice of the red heifer, also, killed as a sin-offering for Israel, was thus connected with hyssop, which was cast into the blood while it was being burned,⁶ and a clean person had to sprinkle the water of separation on an unclean to purify him.⁷ To purge or purify the Psalmist

¹ Ps. ix. 5.² Isa. xxv. 8.³ Job xiv. 4.⁴ Exod. xii. 22.⁵ Lev. xiv. 6.⁶ Num. xix. 6.⁷ Num. xix. 18.

with hyssop, therefore, was to pronounce him, in any case legally, and in this case morally, clean.

The lofty spirituality of the psalm is very striking. The merely outward in religion is recognised as of no value in itself. God, the singer feels, has no pleasure in the victims bleeding on the altar; He takes no delight, even in whole burnt-offerings, sending up smoke and flame. The true sacrifices acceptable to Elohim are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, it is felt, God will not despise. This true prophet-note is found once and again in the Old Testament, "The Lord"—we are told, "is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."¹ Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and lofty place, with him also that is of contrite and humble spirit."² Then, among others, we hear Micah proclaiming, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"³ Nothing in the New Testament goes to the root of the matter more than such texts. They are, in truth, an anticipation of the words of our Lord, "True worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for God is a Spirit."⁴

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 18.

³ Micah vi. 8.

² Isa. lvii. 15; see also lxi. 1; lxvi. 2.

⁴ John iv. 23, 24.

THE SEVENTY-SECOND PSALM.

THE authorship and age of the Seventy-second Psalm have been as variously decided by critics as those of the other sacred odes of the Psalter, although it is associated, at its opening and close, with the names of both Solomon and David. The inscription at the beginning, however, all authorities appear to feel, ought to be "by" Solomon, not "for" him; and this at once points to the concluding verses as originally belonging to some other psalm. But it seems impossible to imagine that even an Oriental king, whatever adulation he might sanction his subjects giving him, could have composed such a sounding eulogy of himself. Nor can we imagine it composed by Solomon, in high-wrought poetical anticipation of the future glory of his foolish son Rehoboam. Moreover, it is not the fact that Solomon was a gracious king to the poor and needy. Instead of that, he was a heartless despot, who so oppressed all classes, that his empire was ready to fall to pieces, from general discontent, at his death.

But to whom can the psalm refer, if we are driven from Solomon and Rehoboam? Strange to say, the idea that has found most support is, that it was written by some unknown poet, in praise of Ptolemy Philadelphus, of Egypt, who was a great friend to the Jews, and, indeed, a second Cyrus to them, giving them wide privileges, and even redeeming, at his own cost, a multi-

tude of Jewish captives. He was raised to the throne in his father's lifetime, in the year 285 B.C., and, to this extent, we may see a fitness in the mention of the "king's son." Yet, whether he were the subject of the psalm or not, every one must feel that, in an infinitely higher sense, it is fitted to hold forth the glories of the unsuffering kingdom of Christ, in a way quite peculiar to that transcendent and more than earthly reign. The following is a revised translation of it:—

1. Give the king (not his own, but) Thy judgments, O God,
And Thy righteousness to the king's son ;
2. That he may judge Thy people righteously,
And Thy poor with justice ;
3. That the mountains may bear peace to the people,
And the hills, through righteousness.
4. May he judge the poor of the people (righteously) ;
May he deliver the children of the needy,
And break in pieces the oppressor !
5. They will fear thee (O king) as long as the sun endures,
As long as the moon ; (yea), throughout all generations.
- 6, He will come down like rain on the mown grass ;
As showers that water the earth.
- 7, In his days shall righteousness flourish,
And abundance of peace, while the moon endureth.
8. May he reign from sea to sea ;
From the river to the ends of the earth !
9. The dwellers in the wilderness, (the rebellious), shall bow
before him :
His enemies shall lick the dust.
10. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles (and coasts) of
the (great) sea shall bring him presents (as to their
lord),
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall pay him tribute.

11. All kings shall fall down before him (in homage);
All nations shall serve him.
12. For he delivereth the needy when he cries;
The poor, also, who have no helper.
13. He spares the weak and needy;
He saves the lives of the needy.
14. He ransoms their life from oppression and violence,
And precious is their blood in his sight :—
15. That he, (the poor man), may live; and to him shall be
given gold of Sheba (by the king);
And for him, (the king), he shall pray continually,
And bless him day by day.
16. May there be abundance of corn in the land, on the top
of the hills!
May its harvest rustle like the leaves of Lebanon!
May men spring up in the cities thick as the grass of
the earth!
17. May his name spread more and more widely for ever!
May it last as long as the sun!
[For] men shall be blessed through him;
All nations shall call him blessed.
18. Blessed be Jehovah Elohim, the God of Israel,
Who only doeth wondrous things;
19. And blessed be His glorious name for ever:
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory!
Amen and Amen.

“From sea to sea,” in verse 8, means “from one side of the ocean, then thought to surround the world, to the other;” and “the river” is a name used of the Nile and the Euphrates, from their importance, but here intended for the latter.

Visions of glory so transcendent must, in any case, have proved largely the golden dreams of poetry, as

applied to any political dominion. But even their magnificent anticipations fall short of the reality when the spiritual reign of Christ is regarded as the realisation of their ideal. Ever since His words first proclaimed new visions of the love of the Eternal Father to mankind, His children, and invited all who heard them to live a godly, righteous, and sober life, as humbly earnest to win His favour and gain His face in the great hereafter, men have been blessed in Him, and have called Him blessed. And still His kingdom spreads. Even among those who truly seek to follow Him, no one can boast of doing so without many failures, and we cannot hope that in the multitudes who are less devoted, there will not be very much that is beneath the Christian standard. Still, how much the world owes to-day to Christianity? The spirit of the age, in Christian countries, is a tribute to its founder, unequalled in the history of any other religion, and thus a direct result of the long-forgotten labours of the faithful souls, who, as the first missionaries to these lands, now see—in another world—the bread cast by them, ages ago, on the waters, returning after so many days.

It may be said of the soldiers of the cross who in our day have taken their place, as it is said of the heavens, "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." England, America, and Protestant Europe has each its small army of noble men and women, doing battle with sin in almost countless spheres. Wherever one goes he finds them. At Cairo and up the Nile I had the pleasure of visiting American missions. The schools at Cairo, under the care of American women, seemed to me most admirably conducted. Nor could there well be

a more delightful sight than the missionary establishment at Assiout, also American; while at Thebes I was entertained, in native fashion, by an Arab sheikh who was an elder of the Presbyterian Church. The American College at Beyrout needs no commendation from me. Its praise is in all the churches. Long may its charming president, Dr. Bliss, see the spreading fruits of his toil, and so may it be with all the band of godly, able men, who in these parts live for the glory of the Lord of love.

Through the whole Turkish empire the influence of the American missionaries is felt each year more widely; the only fear being, that their growing power may lead the government to shut up posts, which radiate so much light into the darkness by which the ruling classes profit, at the terrible cost of the general populations. The schools in connection with the missions are, in all cases, the chief agency for infusing the truth into the native mind; but I have thought that even more use might be made, in all missions, of trained medical men than I have seen. Mrs. Bishop, the great traveller, told me lately, that she had spent a long time in the London hospitals, fitting herself for medical usefulness, before she began her wanderings, and that, as a *hakim*, or doctor, she could travel safely through the most barbarous races. It was thus, indeed, with our Lord Himself; for He went about continually doing good, and healing all manner of diseases and sicknesses among the people. Poor creatures, wearied and heavy laden, need the sorrows of life to be relieved, as far as sympathy and skill can lighten them, and are so touched into friendship with their benefactors, as to listen fondly to their counsels, which otherwise they would not have waited to hear.

EIGHTY-FOURTH PSALM.

THE Eighty-fourth Psalm, one of the most exquisite in the whole Psalter, is fitly inscribed "To the chief Musician upon Gittith," if the fancy have any ground that that term refers to a favourite "march" of David's Gittite body-guard,—the men of Gath,—to whom he committed the safety of his person. The stirring flute music of the band of the brave six hundred, as, under the faithful Ittai, their brother Philistine and their colonel, they marched out, with their royal master, when he fled from Jerusalem to escape the malignity of Absalom, might well have been adopted, in after days, by the Temple music-masters, for just such odes as this song of tender rejoicing in the things of God. On the other hand, "Gittith" has been regarded as a stringed instrument, and even as meaning, "To be played on the 'cithara,'" a "guitar," strung with wire, and played with a plectrum or quill "brought from Gath by David." In any case, "the chief musician" never had a more charming hymn to be warbled forth by his choir or played by his orchestra.

The date of our psalm is a mere matter of conjecture. It has been variously fancied a song of a Levite driven out by Athaliah; a composition of the exiled King Jeconiah, when halted for a night near Hermon, on the way to Babylon; or of some priest carried away with Jeconiah; or of a priest ordered off to Syria by one of its

Greek kings,—perhaps Onias III., High Priest in B.C. 199. He is said to have been the collector of the second section of the Psalter, and was banished to Banias, or Cesarea Philippi. But, as one critic justly says, “They weary themselves in vain who try to discover the author of this lovely psalm.”

The sons of Korah, to whom the musical care of the psalm is assigned, were the descendants of the Korah who was compromised, with Dathan and Abiram, in their opposition to Moses. Three sons of Korah escaped the catastrophe of their house ;¹ if they were not, rather, son, grandson, and great-grandson.² From this small remnant of the clan sprang one of the great musical families of Israel. The Korahites were among the Levite choirs who, in Jehoshaphat’s reign, “stood up to praise the Lord with a loud voice on high.”³ Heman, one of them, in the fourteenth descent from Levi, was intrusted by David with the charge of both the vocal and instrumental service of the Temple,⁴ in association with two others of their gifted race. Twelve psalms are connected with the name of these Korahites, and have been regarded by many as their composition ;⁵ but it is a question whether they were the authors of these specially fine odes, or only the musicians, who set them to fitting strains. All the clan, however, were not so distinguished ; for we find one branch of it acting as doorkeepers of the Temple, though even this office was not without dignity.⁶

The word translated “amiable,” in the first verse, might be rendered, perhaps more forcibly, “What are

¹ Num. xxvi. 11 ; Exod. vi. 24.

² 1 Chron. vi. 22 ff.

³ 2 Chron. xx. 19.

⁴ 1 Chron. xv. 16–22.

⁵ Ps. xlii.–xlix., lxxxiv., lxxxv., lxxxvii., lxxxviii.

⁶ 1 Chron. ix. 19.

the delights" (of Thy tabernacles); for it is plural, and is repeated in the inscription to the Forty-fifth Psalm as a "Song of loves." The name "Lord of hosts" is found ten times in the Psalms, but not in the earlier books of Scripture; its first use being in 1 Samuel,¹ and it does not occur in 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Job, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, or Ezekiel, and is rare in some other books. But, on the other hand, we find it fifty-eight times in Isaiah, seventy-two times in Jeremiah, forty-eight times in Zechariah, and twenty-four times in the short Book of Malachi. It alludes to the glory of Jehovah, as head of the armies of the heavens, consisting of the angels and all other higher beings. Thus we read in 1 Kings,² "I saw Jehovah sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him." Psalm ciii. 21 reads, "Bless Jehovah, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure;" and Psalm cxlviii. 2 says, "Praise ye Him, all His angels: praise ye Him, all His hosts."

In verse 2, the word "longeth" means, literally, "grows pale;" in this case by deep anxiety of mind. "Fainteth" might be rendered "pines away," both words embodying the idea of intense yearning for the delight of approaching God in His house, which, to the Jew, was the only place where he could be really near Him. Even to this day, indeed, the race always turn their faces, in prayer, to the sacred spot where, of old, "His honour dwelt."³ They thought of Him as literally "sitting between the cherubim," and thus, to be far from Jerusalem, was to be, in a very painful sense, far

¹ i. 3, 11.

² xxii. 19.

³ Ps. xxvi. 8.

from God, "their exceeding joy." By the "courts of the Lord" are meant the precincts of the Temple as a whole, including the open space before it, which, though, in the times of the first and second Temples, only half as large as in the days of Herod's Temple, was not less than a number of acres in extent, the present size of what was once the Temple enclosure measuring as many as thirty-five.

Trees rose then, as now, over the wide area, so that one of the psalmists could compare a habitual frequenter of the sanctuary to a tree planted in the courts of the Lord.¹ In the East one sees birds fly out and in, alike at houses and sacred buildings. Doves, for example, in some parts of Palestine, have their nests inside the house, in holes made for them in the house wall; and at Constantinople the flocks of pigeons which abound, flutter out and in through the grand marble mosques, lighting where they please, and, I fancy, breeding on any ledge of the great structure they may select. I do not, however, see how sparrows or swallows could use the Temple altars for breeding-places; for there were only two, of which the altar of incense stood in the Holy Place, while the other, the great altar of burnt-offering, was in constant requisition for sacrifices. Nor was the time of the psalm one of local ruin, when the Temple lay desolate; for worshippers are described as dwelling in God's house, and the Psalmist envies those who are free to make a pilgrimage to Zion, to appear before God. Perhaps the expression is only a poetical one for the sanctuary as a whole.

The priests on duty "dwelt" in the Temple, and the

¹ Ps. xcii. 13.

Psalmist, if a priest, may have thought of the happiness of those thus favoured; but it is said of Anna that she departed not from the Temple, but served God with fastings and prayers, night and day,¹ and hence habitual attendance on the public services may be all that is meant. Pilgrimages to holy places are the holiday trips of Orientals, and in Bible times were especially so. "Ye shall have a song," says Isaiah, "as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with the pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord."² It was the same in all ancient religions. The roads from all parts were alive with crowds streaming to any of the great yearly festivals of the various faiths. At Khan Minieh, on the Lake of Galilee, I saw a great company of pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem to take part in the Easter ceremonies; and a merrier crowd never gathered. A soul like that of the Psalmist, however, would be filled with far loftier thoughts than the wild cavalcade I met.

The valley of Baca, or "Weeping," was, no doubt, some gloomy and sterile spot on the way to Jerusalem, supplying the Psalmist with a ready poetical image; its dreariness bursting out into fertility and beauty at the approach of the Zion pilgrims; springs breaking forth, and copious showers, the ideal of delight in a dry and thirsty land, filling the pools in it, made to catch the rain when it fell, and preserve it for the use of man and beast. Much the same imagery, it will be remembered, is employed in reference to the triumphal return of Israel from Babylon.³

¹ Luke ii. 37.

² Isa. xxx. 29.

³ Isa. xli. 18.

Who is meant by "our shield" and "our anointed" it is impossible to say. One of the priest-kings of later Jewish history would suit such language, but poetry is not bound by exactness of details in its glowing periods.

THE HUNDRED AND THIRD PSALM.

THE One Hundred and Third Psalm, one of the most exquisite in the Psalter, is thought by some of the critics to be marked, by the Chaldee form of a number of its words, as belonging to a late period,—apparently to the latter half of the Persian domination over Judah. This extended from the return from captivity in B.C. 535, when Cyrus allowed the Hebrews to go back to Jerusalem, to B.C. 332, when the Holy City was taken by Alexander the Great,—a period of, we may say, two hundred years. Hence this psalm may be supposed to have been written some time before the year B.C. 400; and it may thus be regarded as the composition of some saintly spirit who was a contemporary of the prophet Malachi.

Such a psalm offers the noblest illustration of the right of Scripture to be held inspired; for in no literature of any age or country is there an approach to the Divine charm which speaks in it, as from the lips of the Eternal Father Himself. What a story might be written, if it were possible to trace the windings of this rivulet of the River of Life, in its long course, of more than two thousand years, through the varied landscapes of man's hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows! In what multitudes of souls must it have gently fanned the smoking flax into a kindling flame! How countless must have been the

hearts, well-nigh broken, to whom it has restored the gladness of fresh hope in God !

The Authorised Version is exceptionally happy in its translation of this pearl of great price, but the different uses of words in our translations of Scripture often throw light on their fuller meaning. Thus we find the word so often used in our psalm, "to bless," rendered,¹ "let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker;" so that to bless God is to bow before Him, in lowly gratitude and adoration for all His mercies, but, still more, for the glorious majesty of His character, as revealed to us in His works and word. Between man and man, it means the invoking blessings from God on each other; and as the greetings of neighbour with neighbour, in the East, take this religious form, we find it very properly rendered, in not a few texts, by "salute." Thus we read² that Elisha told Gehazi, "If thou meet any man, salute (that is, 'bless') him not; and if any salute ('bless') thee, answer him not again." Salutations among Orientals are so elaborate that they cause great loss of time,—which, however, is of no value to these easy-going races.

The idea connected with the word rendered "soul" was very different, among the Hebrews, from our use of it. It means, primarily, anything that breathes, or even gives off a perfume. Thus the word translated "tablet," in the Authorised Version, in Isaiah iii. 20, but rendered "perfume boxes" by the Revisers, in the Hebrew is literally "houses of the soul." In the account of Creation³ the word means simply "life;" for every beast of the earth, and every fowl of the air, and everything that creepeth upon the earth, is said to have a living

¹ Ps. xcvi. 6.

² 2 Kings iv. 29.

³ Gen. i. 30.

soul. All the physical appetites are ascribed to this, and it is also the seat of the feelings, affections, and emotions; but it was only at a comparatively late period that the idea of the soul in our sense, as a separate immortal principle, was realised among the Jews. The full conception of immortality is a gift of Jesus Christ, who, as we are expressly told, "brought life and immortality to light."¹

The word "redeemeth," in the fourth verse, is one of frequent occurrence in senses peculiarly Oriental. In Leviticus,² it is to ransom a field, by the next of kin to the owner, paying back the price. The "avenger," or, as we now say, the "revenger," "of blood," is also in the Hebrew called its "redeemer," it being his imperative duty to demand or inflict punishment for the blood of a kinsman, as the nearest to him. To be a "goel," or redeemer, was, in fact, to perform the part of a kinsman, in any of its numerous obligations. When used in relation to God's dealings with man, any idea of claim must, of course, be cast aside, though we cannot tell how far the simple minds of early ages coloured their relations to heaven, by those in which they stood to their fellow-men. "I know," says Job, "that my redeemer liveth;"³ that is, he knew that God lived, who would deliver him from his troubles, as the avenger of one who had been faithful to Him.

In verse 5, the renewing youth like the eagle, is only an allusion to the wonderful length of life peculiar to that creature, which has been known to thrive, even in captivity, for more than a hundred years.

It is striking how often we meet, in Scripture, with

¹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

² xxv. 25.

³ Job xix. 25.

notices of the "oppressed" (v. 6); but the despotism which in all ages has prevailed in the East explains it. We can, in the main, feel that rights and property are secure among us; but the corruption of the fountains of justice among Orientals, leaves every one more or less exposed to official robbery or private extortion. From the highest to the lowest, every one, as a rule, takes advantage of his neighbour, by whatever form of craft or violence he feels able to use with safety to himself. The unjust judge, the extortioner, and the powerful robber, so often mentioned in the Bible, still flourish. I slept in the tower of a sheikh who, till stripped of well-nigh everything he had, by the Turkish Government, and put in terror of his life, had plundered all who passed through his district. No wonder, then, that oppression is spoken of more than a hundred times in Scripture, and that we should hear so much of the unjust man and of robbery.

The height of the heaven above the earth, among the Hebrews (v. 11), must have been much the same as among other simple communities; perhaps like the idea of an English peasant, who told me he supposed the skies were five miles up, at any rate. In Job,¹ heaven is represented as resting on mountains, which serve as its pillars; and it had doors,² through which God sent down the manna to Israel. It had also its windows,³ through which God sends forth the rains and the lightnings.⁴ All this shows how simple were the notions of these grey fathers of the world.

The scorching of the grass (v. 16) is due to the east wind, which brings the glowing heat of the Syrian deserts

¹ xxvi. 11.

³ Gen. vii. 11; viii. 2.

² Ps. lxxviii. 23.

⁴ Job xxxviii. 25.

over which it blows.¹ When it comes in spring, it makes the heat unendurable, and withers up and scorches all leaves and flowers and grass.² The verse reminds one of the couplet of Dr Johnson :

“Frail as the leaf that quivers on the spray ;
Like it we flourish, and like it decay.”

The contrast between the short-lived grass and the mercy of the Lord, which is from everlasting to everlasting, is beyond expression touching, to a creature so helplessly dependent on it as man. May the Eternal Father find in us that lowliness and love which will make Him show mercy to us in that day !

¹ Jer. iv. 11.

² Gen. xli. 6, 23, 27 ; Ezek. xvii. 10 ; xix. 12 ; Hos. xiii. 15 ; Jonah iv. 8.

WISDOM FROM THE PROVERBS.

TRUE WISDOM.

PROVERBS, Chapter I.

THE prosperity to which Israel attained under Solomon, although concealing abuses destined very soon to paralyse it, caused, as one of its results the founding of a school of literature, which, henceforth, held a prominent place in the history of the national religion and morals. The great king himself is said to have composed three thousand proverbs,¹ the word including, apparently, not only sententious sayings of special pith and wisdom, but multitudes of the fables dear to Orientals, in which trees and animals are introduced as living, and we might say as human beings,—compositions like the parable of Jotham,² or of King Jehoash.³ The example of one so famous naturally led thoughtful minds to cultivate so seductive a vein of composition, while the religious characteristics of the race secured its being applied to the highest questions of the relations of man to God, and our duties toward both God and our fellows.

The Book of Proverbs, as it now stands, appears to have been collected, for the most part, between the reigns of Solomon and Hezekiah,—a period of three hundred

¹ 1 Kings iv. 32.

² Judg. ix. 8-16:

³ 2 Kings xiv. 9.

years. From chapters i.—ix. we have only a general title to the whole book. Chapters x. to xxii. 16 are prefaced by a special title, "The Proverbs of Solomon." Chapters xxii. 17. to xxiv. 22 are described as the "words of the wise." Chapters xxv.—xxix. are headed by the title, "These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." Chapter xxx. is prefaced "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh; the oracle." In chapter xxxi. 1–9 we have "The words of Lemuel, a king; the oracle which his mother taught him;" and the book concludes with an anonymous description of a virtuous woman, the verses of which begin with the different letters of the alphabet in succession.

The section embraced in the first nine chapters is a noble recommendation of wisdom, and takes the form of a poem rather than of proverbs in the ordinary sense. Verses 1–4 of chapter i. give merely the name and general object of the book: "The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel," which have for their aim to help men (1) "to know wisdom and instruction," that is, by warning, admonition, and reproof; (2) "to comprehend the words of understanding" (translated in other texts "wisdom and knowledge"); (3) "to receive instruction in wisdom, justice, and right, and equities" (elsewhere "uprightness," "the things that are equal," "things that are right," "righteously"); (4) "to give subtilty," (a word translated "prudence" elsewhere) "to the simple;" a class who are called, in another text, the "foolish," which really means here easily enticed or led astray—"to the young man" knowledge and discretion," that is, shrewdness and sagacious common-sense; (5) "that he who is wise, by giving ear, may learn

still more, and that the sensible man may attain wise guiding maxims" (6) "through comprehending proverbs and deep sayings; the words of the wise, and also their puzzling questions." Having stated the value of wisdom, the great characteristic of it in its Hebrew sense follows: (7) "To fear Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; they that make light of wisdom and instruction are fools!"

The praise of wisdom now begins, to continue to the end of the ninth chapter, its exordium painting, in broad and vivid touches, what is to be shunned and what striven after. A father is introduced as addressing his son, putting his counsels in the measured parallels familiar to his people:

- 8 Give ear, O my son, to the instruction of thy father,
And thrust not away from thee the teachings of thy
mother!
- 9 For they are a fair garland round thy head,
And glittering chains about thy neck.
- 10 My son, if sinners entice thee,
Do not give in to them!

The passage in verses 11 to 19 reveals a condition of society in Jerusalem only to be found in communities where law is very imperfectly administered, and the tone of public morals is very low. The speaker's son, presumably a young man in a fair position, is exhorted not to join any band of robbers and murderers, as if robbery and murder were so little condemned, or so much a matter of course, even among such as the son might very readily make his acquaintances, that the most earnest cautions were needed to keep him safe. It is impossible to conceive of a "Guide to a Holy Life" in our day, opening by entreaties that the reader would not go with

cut-throats or pick-purses. That so dreadful a possibility existed in the old Jewish community throws light, however, on many passages in the Prophets, describing a state of things in which life and property were utterly insecure, and lawless violence carried its head as high as it does among the Mafia of Sicily. The warnings begin thus :

- 11 If they say, "Come with us, let us lay wait to murder ;
Let us lurk in ambush for some victims, though they
have given no cause for it ;
- 12 Let us swallow them up alive, like the grave—that is,
Sheol—the underworld.
In full health, like those that go down into the pit :
- 13 We shall make a splendid haul of treasure ;
We shall fill our houses with the plunder !
- 14 If you cast in your lot with us,
We shall all have share and share alike !"
- 15 My son, if they tempt you thus, don't go a foot with them ;
Draw back from taking one step in the road they go.
- 16 For the feet of such people run towards evil,
And hasten to shed blood !
- 17 They are no better than the silly birds that fly into the
net,
Even when they see it spread before them ;
- 18 Knowing their danger, their schemes are, one may say,
the laying wait for their own blood ;
Their lurking in ambush is not for others, but for
their own lives.
- 19 Yes ! This is the end of their ways, who plot for unlawful gain ;
Seeking the lives of others, they lose their own !

Wisdom is now pictured as a personality, visiting the busy haunts of men, to move them to listen to her voice :

- 20 Wisdom calls aloud, without ;
She lifts up her voice in the streets :
- 21 She crieth in the busiest places of the city, in the open
space before the city gates, speaking thus :
- 22 “ How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity ?
How long will the scorers delight in their scorning,
And fools hate wisdom ?
- 23 Ye must answer for despising my reproof !
For I call you to note that I will pour out my inmost
thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my words.
- 24 Here they are ! Because I have already called, and ye
refused ;
Because I have stretched out my hand to welcome
your coming to me, and no man regarded ;
- 25 But ye have set at naught all my counsel,
And would none of my reproof :
- 26 I also will laugh at your calamity ;
I will mock when your terror comes ;
- 27 When your terror comes like a destroying storm,
And your ruin like a sweeping whirlwind ;
When distress and anguish come upon you !
- 28 Then shall they call upon me,—but I will not answer !
They shall seek me earnestly,—but they shall not find me !
- 29 Because they hated knowledge,
And have not taken pleasure in the fear of Jehovah :
- 30 And did not accept my counsel :
But despised all my reproof ;
- 31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,
And have their fill of their own devices.
- 32 For the turning away of the simple from me shall slay them,
And the careless, passing prosperity of fools like them,
shall be their ruin.
- 33 But he who listens to me, Wisdom, shall dwell secure
And have quiet without fear of evil.

WORTHY LIFE.

PROVERBS, Chapters II. and III.

HEAVENLY Wisdom, which is represented in the first chapter of Proverbs, as no less marked by a love of openness, and appeal to the reason and conscience of men, than its opposite is, for secrecy and darkness, stands, in the second chapter, in the places of chief concourse in the city, warning the foolish and counselling the irresolute. Her hands are uplifted in earnest appeal, and her whole bearing like that of the noblest of the prophets, who pleaded, in the same way, with their generation, in the streets and open space at the city gates.

The ruin of life by folly is the burden of the first chapter. The benefits of Wisdom, in every relation of man to God or his fellows, are recounted in the second. Everything depends on the sincerity of our desire to know her counsels, and our inflexible continuance in obeying them. We must incline our ear, apply our heart, cry after knowledge of her, seek her as men seek for silver or for hidden treasures; and only when we do so will she be found. For true wisdom is the gift of God. To him who obtains it, Jehovah becomes a shield from folly and a guide in the ways of uprightness. Wisdom gives discretion and understanding, which will guard him who has them from the snares of the worthless of both sexes. Without wisdom, man's path leads

to "the shades;" with it, is life. While the sinner dies, the upright shall dwell alive in the land. As to the wicked, they shall be cut off, and transgressors shall be rooted out (v. 22).

Hitherto the voice of Wisdom has sought to arm the young man against the seductions of evil associates by painting the calamities that such "folly" brings on him. In the third chapter she goes on to show, with more detail, the attractions of the path which she invites us to tread, at once in itself and in its fruits. True wisdom, cries she, besides all worldly benefits it secures, brings also the priceless honour of high favour with God. But it must never be forgotten that the only wisdom He recognises is that which springs from a sincere religiousness. This, however, will give him who has it long life, and quiet from fear of evil. He who values the two graces, kindness—that is, love—and absolute truthfulness, enjoined by wisdom, binding them like golden chains round his neck, and also writing them on the tables of his inmost soul, will find favour with God and man.

The mention of these two Divine powers, love and truth, calls forth an exhortation to seek only that wisdom which rests on the fear of God, since mere worldly prudence is not enough. But this can only be done if we give up all confidence in ourselves, and lean on the wisdom that comes from above,—if we acknowledge our need of heavenly guidance in all our paths, and, while thus fearing Jehovah, resolutely turn away from all evil. To him who acts thus, such "wisdom" will be a blessing beyond thought. "It will be medicine to his flesh, and refreshment to his bones" (8). He who identifies himself in such a way with God will naturally

honour Him with his substance, and with the firstfruits of all his increase (9); words which may either mean, generally, the exercise of a generous liberality in all that promotes good among men, or, possibly, the careful payment of tithes and firstfruits ordered by the Law. These, however, are not elsewhere mentioned in the whole book, apparently as too formal and priestly; and therefore it may be better to think of the wide virtue of beneficence to man at large, than only of payments to the clergy, though no man that fears God will be wanting in due care of His public servants.

To such generous bounty there is promised the richest acknowledgment from above. The barns of him who shows it will be filled with plenty, and his presses will stream over with new wine (10). It needs hardly be said, however, that everything depends on the motive of our good works. To be generous, in the belief that it is only an investment at high interest, with God for security, makes the whole a mere trick of sordid selfishness, which can bring no blessing. To give for love, hoping for nothing again, is very different.

Yet we are not, in any case, to count on worldly prosperity, however sincere we may be in our fidelity to God (11). Chastisement may be sent, even though Jehovah recognise us as His sons. To be afflicted, Wisdom assures us, may, indeed, be a sign of our heavenly sonship; "For whom Jehovah loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." That our chastisement should be called "correcting," in itself is consoling; for "to correct" means "to make right,"—not an implication that we were previously altogether wrong, as might be said of those set on evil, but as the putting into the

straight road again, those who, for the moment, had lost it. Eliphaz was right in saying to Job much the same as Wisdom says to her audience, though he drew a wrong inference from even so consolatory a truth, in the case of the patriarch.¹ It seems, indeed, to have been a widespread conviction through age after age; for we have it here in Proverbs, which reflects the ideas of the days after Solomon. Eliphaz shows that it was familiar beyond Israel; for he was from Teman, in Edom, and therefore one of another race than the Hebrew. The author of the Ninety-fourth Psalm, the date of which is very late, repeats it. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes it; and it is reproduced once more by John the Divine in the Revelation.²

A fresh eulogium on Wisdom now begins : (13) " Well is it for the man who has found wisdom, and for the man who wins understanding ; for to gain her is better than to gain silver, and there is more profit in having her than in having fine gold. She is more precious than the costly red coral or pearls. All the things thou prizest most are not to be compared with her. (16) Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of sweet delight, and all her paths are peace. (18) She is a very tree of life to them that make her theirs, and happy is every one who holdeth her fast. (19) So great and glorious, indeed, is she, that she was the helper of Jehovah, in His founding the earth and preparing the heavens. By His having wisdom in an infinite measure, He broke up the floods, so that part sank into the channels He had made for it, and became the ocean ; and part floated overhead, to be the storehouse and mother of dew."

¹ Job v. 17, 18.

² Job v. 17 ; Ps. xciv. 12 ; Heb. xii. 5, 6 ; Rev. iii. 19.

Having thus exalted the glories of the truly wise, a new exhortation to the "son" to seek this priceless blessing is begun: (21) "My son, keep fast hold of sound wisdom and discretion, and never let them out of thy sight; for thus they will be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck, as if it were adorned with chains of gold.¹ Then thou shalt walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy rest shall be sweet."

¹ Prov. i. 9.

A CLUSTER OF PROVERBS.

PROVERBS, Chapters X. to XII.

AT the beginning of chapter x. we meet the inscription "The Proverbs of Solomon," and the section thus introduced continues to the end of the sixteenth verse of the twenty-second chapter, where a new collection of similar counsels begins, described as "The Words of the Wise;" the sayings of various authors of repute being comprised in it. The earlier portion, however, with the first nine chapters which were joined with it,—the original "Proverbs,"—constitutes the most important division of the book as it now stands.

The twelfth chapter opens with fresh praise of knowledge. "He who loves knowledge loves warning, admonition, and reproof, such as parents give to children, or as God gives to men; but he who hates these is as stupid as a cow." Yet it is largely true, even here, that "a good man obtains favour from Jehovah, but a plotting, wicked man, He condemns." This, however, to make it balance the first half of the verse, really implies that, whereas the good man gets favour from God, the man of wicked craft gets nothing but punishment; which can only be true of his spiritual worsening; for in this world, as we know, the ungodly often prosper. Verse 3 continues the same moral. "Nobody (really) prospers through wickedness; but the righteous are like a deep-rooted tree, which nothing can overturn."

A new subject is now introduced—the priceless worth of a truly good woman. The word translated “virtuous” is rendered very differently in some texts compared with others. We have it translated by “wealth,” “activity,” “valiant,” “able,” “worthy,” and much else; but the fundamental idea running through all, appears to be, as applied to the wife in the present verse, what Americans mean by “a capable woman,” including moral worth, as well as energy, or a good head and heart. Such a gift of God may well be declared a crown, to the man fortunate enough to be her husband. The bad wife, on the other hand, is the greatest of earthly calamities. “A woman that maketh her husband ashamed is like rottenness in his very bones.” Yet, to be no more than “virtuous,” in our English sense, is far from enough to make a pattern wife. I have known many wives who were indisputably virtuous, but pre-eminently unsatisfactory, notwithstanding. It takes a great deal more than this negative charm to make a woman a desirable helpmate, though it is one of many essentials.

Reverting to the contrast of the evil and the upright, we have now the further point, that “even the thoughts, and, of course, much more the words and acts, of the worthy, are straightforward and just towards all men. As to the wicked, on the other hand, the counsels they give, which are so much more serious than secret thoughts can be, have treachery and deceit as their aim.” “The words of the wicked are ambushes for the blood of others; by their words, their false accusations, their false witness and slander, they bring their neighbours into peril of life.” “But, in spite of all, the mouth of the upright shall deliver *them*; their innocence being made clear by

their straightforward truthfulness." "If a blow which casts him down falls, from any quarter, on a wicked man, he sinks, never to rise; but the house of the upright stands firm and unshaken, blow what storms may."

"A man is held in esteem according to the measure of his intelligence, understanding, and wisdom; but men despise him that is of a perverse heart," or, as the Greek text puts it, "But men turn up their nose at the man who is slow of heart, (or stupid)." "A man of humble position who is yet able to keep a slave, is better than he who gives himself airs and is without bread." Absolute poverty is wretched enough, nor is that held up as desirable, or of no weight, but a modest living, with neither poverty nor riches, has, the sacred writer would have us realise, a peculiar pleasure, if we are only contented with it. The having a slave, it will be noticed, is assumed as quite a desirable thing. Slavery has been a feature of Eastern life in every age, and still exists in all Oriental countries, in which Western supremacy has not more or less stopped it. Ewald, by a slight change of the text, translates the verse, "A humble man, if by his own toil he has bread, is more to be thought enviable than a man who busies himself after honour, and neglects to supply his household." But the rendering I have given is to be preferred.

"The good man studies the wants and well-being of his beast; but the inner heart of the wicked is cruel." The "bowels" were regarded by the Hebrews as the seat of the feelings, good or bad; and, in this case, the word is to be taken in its meaning of what is hateful, for "bowels" is the expression in the Hebrew. Cruelty to dumb animals is, indeed, a sure sign of moral degradation, but it

is, unfortunately, too common, even still. Take Italy, for example. In that land the treatment of domestic animals is horrible. I have seen flocks of sheep so nearly starved to death, that the owner would have been put in jail for his cruelty if he had been in England; and as to the treatment of horses in Naples, it is dreadful.

"He that tills his ground will make his bread sure: but he who is idly busy, and hunts after what is worthless, has no sense." This reminds one of the fable of Kriloff, in which two brothers are equally industrious, but while the one, after a time, has his barn full of a rich harvest, the other can only boast of two barrels-full of dead flies, which he had spent the summer in catching. The meaning of the twelfth verse is much disputed. In the Greek Bible we have a striking variation, however, that gives a good sense: "The desires of the wicked are evil, but the root of the righteous is in a fortress." Ewald's translation is, "The desire of the wicked is a snare-net of evils, yet the root of the upright continues." That is, the net of the wicked, while set for others, gathers all kind of evils for the wicked himself. Delitzsch renders it, "The godless hunt after the gains which bad men seek, (but with only evil results to themselves,) but the root of the godly flourishes from within."

"There lies a ruin-bringing snare in the sin of the lips; but the upright man comes safe out of his straits." This may be paraphrased thus: Any one may easily get into trouble by thoughtless words, but the upright may be expected to clear himself, because, from the first, he has been careful to guard against what is wrong, or from giving a handle to the wicked-minded. "From the fruit of his mouth an upright man reaps a harvest of good;"

that is, his discourse is like good seed, which, by its nature, brings to him good fruits. "And what a man's hands do shall be returned to him again." "The way of a fool is straight, or right, in his own eyes," and so he goes on, to his hurt; "but he who listens to the counsels of others is wise," because our way is often right in our own opinion, though in reality the reverse. But to see this requires other eyes than our own.

PATERNAL COUNSELS.

PROVERBS, Chapter XXIII. 15-23.

THE famous Dr. Thomas Guthrie used to say that if the Book of Proverbs were made the universal reading-book in schools, it would be at once the greatest help to the maintenance of pure English and the surest source of a high public morality. Nor can there be a question of either opinion; for the English is perfect, and the morality is based on the solid foundation of healthy religious feeling.

Compared, for instance, with the proverbs of Benjamin Franklin, in "Poor Richard's Almanac," those of the Bible are recommended by absolutely opposite considerations. With Franklin, "wisdom" is shrewd common-sense applied to everyday affairs, so that they may be made to pay best, in coin, comfort, and reputation. With the Bible Proverbs, "wisdom" is loving obedience to the right, as the will of God, and, in itself, our duty and reward. The lower form of "wisdom" looks only over the sweep of our worldly interests, casting no glance to the heavens; the other, first looks upwards to the Eternal Father, and then, filled with a deep sense of His claims to supreme love and reverence, sets itself to act as becomes the child of such a God, in putting away all evil from its own life and bosom, and by unselfish goodness in the world around. Franklin teaches selfish

utilitarianism; the Bible holds up the shining claims of "duty."

Let me illustrate this from a few verses.¹ "My son," says a father to his child, "if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak what is right." It is taken for granted that the son is not born wise, "foolishness" being regarded as "bound up in the heart of a child."² The Arabs have a saying very similar: "The wise man knows the mind of a fool, because he was once a fool himself." But, among the Hebrews, to be wise is not to be what we call "worldly-wise." It has always a moral sense, as we see in its influence on the spoken thoughts of him who possesses it. His natural, chosen aim is "the right,"—an expression which means what is straightforward, perfectly truthful, without mental reservation, honest in word and deed, faithful to duty, literally meaning whatever is said. Can there be a finer ideal of character? A man you can trust is immeasurably nobler, were he the poorest of the poor, than one whom you have to distrust, were he as rich as the Duke of Westminster.

The want of this lofty wisdom is the dry rot in any state; the general display of it would be that "righteousness that exalts a nation." And if one look thoughtfully at the subject, it is beyond question that the best man is the wisest man; for, after all, a man's real life is, not what he has, but what he is. We need to be saved from our worse selves. In every man there is a possibility of unlimited development in what is good,—that is, God-like; and, with an eternal existence before us, the condi-

¹ Prov. xxiii. 15-23.

² Prov. xxii. 15.

tions of which are, and must be, determined by our advancement in true worth during this short life, he, surely, is the wisest man who strives to be freest from the sordid and earthly tendencies which, as we instinctively feel, are quite unfitted for the world to come. The development of all that is good in principles and action is, in fact, so far, our salvation.

What we are and what we become must depend on ourselves. No one can be good for us; for goodness is the state of our own heart. It is the free choice of what is right, and the repudiation of what is evil. Goodness is not goodness unless it be deliberately our choice, and the choice, to have any moral worth, must be the free act of our will. Surely he who, with his eyes towards the heavens, to crave help in his purpose, makes it his aim to live a truly wise life (that is, a truly worthy one), is immeasurably more sensible than the man who thinks himself wise if he can overreach his neighbour, by whatever form of selfishness.

No wonder that a son who shows himself nobly upright in all his relations, those of business competition included, scorning to gain a mean advantage of his neighbour, and keeping miles away from even the appearance of deceit, makes the heart of a worthy father exult. The man who gives himself up to folly, whether in the form of an absorbing passion for money, or in that of vice or frivolity, is like the larva in which the ichneumon fly lays its egg. The parasite lets the poor grub live, in a manner, but it eats out all the parts which would have transformed it into a winged creature of the air, so that, when it passes into a chrysalis, there is nothing left to emerge from it, and it dies as it lived, only a crawling worm.

This being so, it is fitting that the father who speaks, should exhort his son (v. 17) not to let his heart envy the apparent or outward prosperity of the unprincipled. Let him rather crave to have, ever, more of the fear of God before his eyes, all the day long; for assuredly there is a future, in which their seeming wisdom will be fed with ashes, while the hope of him who fears God will never be disappointed.

He next cautions his son against wine, which must have been abused then, much as it is now among ourselves. Palestine, in fact, was a noted vine-growing country, as its dry chalk-hills and warm climate fitted it specially for viniculture. That the result was a sad amount of drunkenness is seen in the repeated warnings of the prophets, leading, in fact, to the establishment of such rules of total abstinence from wine, as we see in the Rechabites and Nazarites, and in the prohibition from tasting it, commanded to the priests during their turn of duty. "Hear thou, my son," says the father, "and shew thy wisdom in this, among other things, that thou keep aloof from wine-tiplers; for they are riotous abusers of their own lives." Some render the words "from gluttonous eaters," in allusion to men given to the pleasures of the table, generally. "For the drunkard and the riotous liver," he adds, "shall come to poverty; and the sleep such a life induces shall clothe a man with rags."

It is as if he said: "My son, live temperately and plainly. To give yourself to a liking for strong drink, or the gross enjoyments of the appetite, will unman you, to say nothing of its sinfulness. To drink will unfit you for anything, clouding the brain, and making

you no longer your own master. As to riotous living, whether at the table or in dissipation and vice of any kind, it will make shipwreck of your character, your property, your whole better self, and will bring you to poverty and rags. How true this is, every one knows. Our prisons, our hospitals, our workhouses, our mad-houses, tell the same story. Keep aloof from the beginning of such a life. If you would not sound the bell, don't play with the rope. If you would not burn your wings, keep away from the smoke, far less the flame.

The next counsel (vs. 22, 23) is of signal value in our day. The young are now prematurely old, in their bearing to their parents, in too many cases. They affect independence when they are still in jackets or short skirts. A true nature, however, will always feel that the proper attitude of children and youth, toward father and mother, is to "hearken" to them, and take the greatest care to treat them with all respect. Few, it is to be hoped, will despise their mother when she is old, the fear of such a crime belonging rather to the East, where woman always has been so lightly regarded, than to the West, where a mother, if she be worthy of that holy name, is the object of a half-justifiable idolatry. Yet I have seen awful instances of filial ingratitude and worthlessness. To cultivate deep respect to its parents, from the very dawn of a child's faculties, is the only way to be sure that it will venerate them in riper years. And such instilling of right principles into the infant mind, must be the special work of the parents themselves. The father must teach reverence towards the mother, and the mother must teach it towards the father.

The lesson of a noble life could not be summed up in

better words than those that follow : “ Buy the truth, and sell it not ; buy, and never sell, wisdom and instruction and understanding.” “ God is truth,” and Jesus Christ tells us that He was born and came into the world that He might bear witness to the truth. Be it yours to say the same. To do so, is your privilege and your duty ; for your highest aim must ever be to imitate our Lord. “ He left us an example, that we should follow His steps.” Be true in word and deed ; true in public and in private ; true in politics, national and local ; true in business, in friendship, in religion,—in all things. Let no insincerity ever cloud your bosom. Finally, “ be true to your own self, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

THE PRAISE OF SOBRIETY.

PROVERBS, Chapter XXIII. 29-35.

THE low round hills of Palestine—low in their elevation above the surrounding country, though from two to three thousand feet above the sea—are, as I have said, peculiarly suited to the growth of the vine. Their soft chalky limestone, dry and warm, supplies the mineral food required, while the temperature, at once warm enough, but also equable, and the moist sea winds which bring the refreshment needed, combine to secure abundant and specially high-class vintages. Hence, from the earliest times, the wines of Palestine were famous, and they continued to be so until the Arab conquest, when the introduction of Mahommedanism forbade the use of all intoxicating drinks, to those who accepted the new creed.

But the drink of the people of the land was not confined to wine. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, we read in Egyptian inscriptions, not only of the wine, but of the beer, of the Holy Land; and the Hebrews, when they came, took fondly to both indulgences. In the Bible, wine, strong drink, and drunkenness are mentioned very often. Wine and the matters connected with it are introduced about a hundred and twenty-five times; “strong drink” is mentioned eighteen times, and drunkenness and drunkards are brought before us at least seventy times.

The Hebrews, therefore, must have been very far from the sober people we now find in their old land. Yet they had been absolutely total abstainers for the whole forty years they were in the wilderness; for we are told¹ that, during all that time, they had “drunk neither wine nor strong drink.” The order of Nazarites was instituted by Moses,² as if to provide a warning and a pattern, for the time when the possession of the Promised Land, would put strong drink within their reach; and his horror of possible drunkenness among priests was shown, by his commanding that they should abstain from even tasting it, during the time they were in residence at the tabernacle or temple, for the discharge of their turn of duties.

Like ourselves, the Jews had various intoxicating beverages. There was beer, made from barley, with lupins for hops; cider, which they called “apple-wine;” mead, or “honey-wine,” which seems to have been wine mixed with honey and pepper; date-wine, made from the fruit of the palm, which ripens, from Gaza, south; while still other “wines” were manufactured from figs, millet, pomegranates, and, indeed, from whatever would ferment. But with a divinely instituted total-abstinence society in their midst, from the wilderness days, in the order of Nazarites, and with the warning prohibition laid on the priests, it was clearly the fault of the people themselves, if they turned the fertility of these lands, which might have been a blessing, into a curse.

Nor were earnest “temperance speakers” and writers wanting, to stimulate the masses to sobriety. The prophets, generation after generation, denounced

¹ Deut. xxix. 5, 6.

² Num. vi. 2.

drunkenness as strongly as any modern lecturer,¹ and the Proverbs, embodying the counsels of the best of the Jewish nation, are vigorous in their condemnation of drinking. What, for example, could be more sweeping than the following passage?²

“Who cries ‘Ah!’ who cries ‘Woe’s me!’ Who has quarrellings? Who has complainings? Who has wounds for which he has given no ground? Who has dark angry flashings of the eyes? They who sit long by the wine; they who go into the house to try strong, mixed, spiced wine.” To all, the sacred counsellor says: “Do not thou even look at the wine, or note how temptingly it shows its red glow in the cup; how smoothly it will glide down. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a hissing viper. Its poison tooth will pour its venom into your blood. Your fevered brain will make your eyes see all manner of fantasies, hideous and horrible, and your heart will speak what will shame and hurt you. Yes, you will, when overpowered by drink, be swallowed up by it, so far as your senses are concerned, and cut off from all your affairs, as the man is, who lies drowned in the depths of the sea. Drink, like a devouring flood, will sink you for the time, out of all that makes up your life.

“You put yourself in as much danger if you drink, as he does who falls asleep on the wildly shaken top of a mast. It is bad enough on the deck, but in the ‘crow’s nest,’ the rolling almost dips the mast in the water, on this side and that, each moment, making it a wonder that one lying in such a place is not hurled into the

¹ Isaiah v. 22; xix. 14; xxviii. 1, 7, 8; Jer. xxiii. 9.

² Prov. xxiii. 29-35.

waves. So, the man who is drunk puts himself into a succession of dangers, which, in many different ways, may have a bad ending for him. One would think that all this would make a tippler pause, and give up his folly.

“But, alas! the iron net of ‘habit’ has covered him, so that he is helpless in the toils. In spite of all he has suffered, and of all the dangers he has run, he thinks no more of them when his debauch is, for the moment, slept off; and this is indeed the most terrible result of his vice. In his muddled way, he says to himself, ‘They beat me, that’s true, but I’m none the worse; they cudgelled me, but I don’t trouble myself about it. I shall have another sleep, and then, when I wake in the morning, I shall go after that charming wine again, and have another bout.’”

I have amplified the words of Scripture, but have carefully preserved the sense. The difference in some of the renderings, is only from a more exact presentation of the full meaning of the Hebrew. No modern picture of the folly and deadly evil of the sin of drunkenness could be more vivid. No appeal to give up all use of intoxicants could be more fervent. If we are ourselves sober, is the giving up of all strong drink too great a sacrifice to make, for our brother in danger from the public-house? If so, what is our love for him worth?

THE HEBREW IDEAL OF A WIFE.

PROVERBS, Chapter XXXI. 10-31.

THE Book of Proverbs very suitably closes with a eulogy, in poetical form, of the ideal wife.¹ The first nine verses of the chapter are ascribed to an unknown personage,—“Lemuel, a king.” The word translated “the prophecy” in our version, is made a proper name by some, so as to read “of Massa;” but as no kingdom of that name is known, the emendation does not tell us much.

The poem that follows is constructed so that each verse begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet,—a peculiarity recurring in Psalms ix. and x. and the first four chapters of the Book of Lamentations. It seems to have been early in fashion among Hebrew poets, for some critics ascribe the Ninth and Tenth Psalms to the age of David; others, to the time of the fall of Nineveh, or to the era after the Exile. The eulogy on the virtuous woman, as part of the section of Proverbs “which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out,”² may reasonably be set down as very old, since the collection was made up of “proverbs” esteemed ancient in Hezekiah’s day.

“A virtuous woman,” that queen of wives, may be found; but pearls are more easily got than she, and she surpasses their exceeding worth, as the rarely fortunate

¹ Prov. xxxi. 10-31.

² Prov. xxv. 1.

husband finds. The sense in which the term "virtuous" is used, may be gathered from the good qualities extolled, as marking the wife thus described. She is immensely active, devotedly domestic, skilful in managing her household, a clever business woman, thoroughly sensible, gracious to all, careful to wake kindly feeling to every one and in every one, and, above all,—indeed, as the root of all,—“a woman that feareth Jehovah.”

The heart of her husband can trust her absolutely, and gain by her labour will not fail him. The word for “husband,” by the way, is “her Baal;” that is, “her lord.” She will do him good, not hurt, all the days of her life. How she will do so is now shown. She busies herself getting in wool and flax, and, having secured a stock of them, she works them up with a joy even her hands share. Woollen cloth was the staple material of clothing among the Jews.¹ Linen of various degrees of fineness was also much used, as may be judged from no fewer than five words being found in Scripture for it. At present, cotton has taken the place of linen, in the East, to a very large extent; but in old times we find various “garments” and girdles, winding-sheets, towels, napkins, &c., of linen mentioned.² To prepare either wool or flax for making cloth implies a great many processes, so that, even from this one source, the wife would have no little to fill up her time.

As merchant ships, not content with what can be had near at hand, sail off afar, to spy out and use new markets, so the wife of our poem looks out, over a wide range, for chances of some advantage, in selling her

¹ Lev. xiii. 47; Deut. xxii. 11; Job xxxi. 20; Ezek. xxxiv. 3; Hos. ii. 5.

² Ju g. xiv. 12, 13; Isa. iii. 23; Mark xv. 46; John xi. 44; xiii. 4, 5.

webs, and is careful to secure it when discovered; thus in a very practical sense "bringing her food from afar."

At this day a wife in the peasant cabins of Palestine rises to fill her wretched lamp with oil while it is still dark, and does not think of lying down again, as the barley has to be ground for the day's bread, and the bread itself baked. Her husband may sleep on, but for her there is no more rest. The "virtuous woman," like her, rises before the sun, and sets the mill stones to work, to "give meat to her household," though she is painted as, fortunately, having "maidens" that is, slave-girls, to whom she thus early sets their various tasks for the day, and among these, we may hope, the heavy labour of grinding, which was far more suitable work for them than for the house-mother.

But the ideal wife is not contented to manage her household, and let her husband attend to investments of any gain she may make, over household expenses. She takes a fancy to a piece of ground, and buys it with her profits in trade. Still more, she turns it into a vineyard, paying the cost from the same hoards. Nor is it any wonder she makes money thus; for she girds herself round with energy, and makes her arms strong by her constant industry,—words which point to her life as spent in physical labour of the kind now left to men, or to women in a very humble position. She "likes the taste of her gains," and, to make more, she works all through the night, her lamp being kept burning till morning.

Any one living for a time in an Italian or Sicilian village will see the women standing on the top of their stair-wall, or other slight elevation, letting fall a distaff,

trimmed with its oval of tow, twirling, in multitudinous revolutions, as the thread is twined, for weaving. This is part of what the "virtuous woman" does, presumably through the night; winding up the yarn as it is twisted on the spindle in her hand, from which, when it is put into the loom, she will draw the threads for weaving her cloth.

But while thus bent on money-making, even at the cost of necessary sleep, she has a far better side; for she has kept her heart tender. It appears, indeed, that her motive in all her wonderful industry, and in her liking for gain, is not a selfish one, but the yearning desire to benefit others. "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." The same loving thoughtfulness and devotion are seen in her care of her household. On the Jewish hills, winter storms of driving snow are not infrequent. Indeed, a friend lately told me how he had lost his way, trying to get to the gates of Jerusalem, from where the vehicle in which he had been riding towards the city, had been stopped by snow, before he came in sight of the walls. The drift had completely obliterated all traces of the road. But if such fierce weather broke over the home of the poet's ideal wife, she needed have no concern; for her motherly forethought had provided her whole household with thickly lined garments of warm scarlet cloth, so that they were at once defended from the cold, and notable for the fine show of their outfit. Everything, moreover, in her home, is in keeping with this. There is as little to fear from the cold by night as by day, for she makes coverlets, warm and beautiful, for the beds. As to herself, she has the finest, most

lovely clothing, of snowy linen and costly cloth, dyed with the Tyrian purple.

Through such a wife, her husband grows in honour, and takes his place among the sheiks of the land when they sit in council, to settle disputes, or transact town affairs, in the public gathering-place, outside the gates. No wonder her family is so favourably known, for her cleverness is seen on all sides. She makes up, besides spinning the cloth for them, night-dresses, curtains, cloth for samplers, and body-linen of all kinds, but especially the smock-frocks or blouses of linen, worn by the mass of the people in the hot weather. For all this is given, in the Talmud, as included in the Hebrew word used. She makes costly girdles, also, and sells them to the Phœnician trader, from whom she gets her Tyrian dye.

Commanding ability and a dignified bearing sit on her like a robe; and she laughs at the time to come, knowing she is well prepared to meet it. But she is good as well as able. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and loving counsel is in her words. She takes good heed how things go on in her house, seeing that all goes right in its daily life and daily provision, and assuredly does not eat the bread of idleness. No wonder that her sons, as they grow up, call her "blessed," or that her husband praises her, declaring that, though "many daughters of Israel may have shown high qualities, she had excelled them all."

Now comes the moral by the poet. "Womanly charms deceive, and beauty is only a breath; but men will praise a woman that fears Jehovah. Take care that she enjoy her full share of the blessings she creates, and let her works themselves speak for her, before all, in the gates."

“THE PREACHER.”

THE portion of the Bible which is known to us from the name “Ecclesiastes,” given it in the Greek version of the Seventy, is called in Hebrew *Kohелеth*, which means “one who gathers a circle of hearers.” It corresponds, therefore, more exactly to the Greek word, than to the term “preacher,” by which it is rendered in the English version.

The *Kohелеth* of the book is identified with Solomon, by the description, “son of David, king in Jerusalem.” It is a question whether Solomon is thus described as the author, or is introduced dramatically into the work of a much later writer. “The Wise King” was regarded, naturally, as the originator of a class of writings which have come to be known as the “Wisdom Literature,” and which treat of morals and the practical philosophy of life. For this reason it was not unusual, among the later Jews, to connect his name with compositions of this class, even where there could be no supposition that he would be taken for the actual author. Thus we have The Psalms of Solomon, a book in favour with the Pharisees, and The Wisdom of Solomon, which is included in the Old Testament Apocrypha; being found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

It is held by the majority of critics, on good grounds, that Ecclesiastes cannot have been the work of Solomon.

Various characteristics of the Hebrew of the book, and many other grounds, forbid the ascription of it to the wise king. The date, however, is uncertain. Modern critics have placed it at various points between the times of Jeremiah and those of Herod the Great. The internal data seem to justify those who refer it to the last days of the Persian domination, which ended with Alexander's victory at Arbela, B.C. 333. The historical allusions show that the author lived amid the depression of an unjust and capricious Oriental despotism, in a society heaving with discontent and swarming with spies, but destitute of hope of improvement.¹ The choice of Solomon to be a mouthpiece for the author's reflections, was due to his historic position and great mental gifts.

The opening words of the book give the keynote to the whole: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,"—words which end the book as they begin it. The doctrine of human immortality had not become, as yet, an article of Hebrew faith, and he, like the men of his day, can think only of a dim, ghost-like existence in Sheol.² "The spirit returning to God who gave it" is with him no indication of belief in future existence, but the intimation that the Divine breath which made him a living being passes back to God, and is no more.

This explanation of the point of view of the writer, helps us to put ourselves in his place, in the counsels with which his gloomy reflections are interspersed, as, for example, in the fifth chapter.³ "Take care," says he there, "how you go to the house of God" (Elohim). Moses was ordered to take off his shoes; for the place

¹ Eccles. iii. 16; iv. 1; v. 8; viii. 9; x. 5 ff., 7, 20.

² Eccles. iii. 19; vi. 6; ix. 5.

³ Eccles. iv. 17 of the Heb.

on which he stood was holy; and Orientals, even now, take off their shoes on going into a house, lest the chamber they enter may have at some time been used for prayer. Isaiah, moreover, reproaches his generation with trampling the holy courts like so many cattle.¹ "To draw nigh to hear," and thus to offer the high sacrifice of true obedience, with a calm, collected spirit, "is better," we are told, than to go to the holy place with light thoughts, like foolish people who, not fancying that they sin in doing so, present mere formal offerings, in which the heart has no share. Even before the rise of the synagogue, the reading of the Law in set lessons was part of the Temple service; and there were, besides, psalms, prayers, and the "blessing," so that worshippers could "hear," and needed not, as in old times, merely to look at the priest going through his functions.

In the same way men should beware, says Koheleth, of thoughtless praying or vowing, in their visits to the sanctuary. "Be not quick (or rash) with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for He is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore, seeing He is so exalted, let thy words be few."² For just as a confused dream comes through too much toil and exhaustion, so, through the multitude of words, tiring and confusing the mind, a man's prayer becomes meaningless, sinful folly.

He now proceeds to give counsel respecting vows, to which his countrymen were much addicted. To make these in a moment of anxiety, and not to pay them when the mental excitement was over, was as common among them as among the people of the Middle Ages, who were

¹ Exod. iii. 5; Isa. i. 12.

² Prov. x. 19; Matt. vi. 7.

constantly vowing to give this or that to the shrine of some saint, if he would help them in some trouble, and as constantly neglecting to carry out what they had promised when the danger was past. "But, when thou vowest," says Koheleth, "perhaps as thou prayest, delay not to pay it, for fools are displeasing to both God and man, and have no steadfast mind." Therefore do not lie to God. Better not to vow at all, than to vow and not perform.

Do not be hurried into sin by your mouth. If a messenger come from the priest for what you vowed, do not tell him either he or you were wrong, and try to get out of it. Instead of getting a blessing, you will, by such mockery, bring down the anger of God on yourself, and rouse Him to destroy your prospects, by taking away your health, or by upsetting your plans. Be careful, therefore, how you vow; for in too many words, as in the confusion of a dream, there is always vanity. But fear thou God! To do so, however, implies a belief that God rules the affairs of men; and since this is so, says the Preacher, "if thou seest the oppression of the poor, by violence, extortion, pillage, or fraud; if thou seest the outrage of all justice and right by the authorities in a pashalic, do not give way to fear and wonder,—be not in consternation; for over the great man who oppresses the lowly there stands a higher, who oppresses him in turn; and both have over them a still higher,—that is, God, who will call both to account. Indeed, even the great king has bounds set to his power; for he himself is dependent on the industry of his people in the field."

Nor do they need to wonder at the great inequalities of man's lot. All is not gold that glitters. There are

compensations for poverty. The man who gloats on having wealth is not satisfied with what he has, after all. The more he has, the more he wants. Thus the craving for wealth is mere folly. As riches increase, expenses grow; so that a rich man has only the name of being so, and can but look on, while others enjoy themselves in devouring his substance. Even the humble blessing of sleep, which is not denied the poorest slave, whether he lie down hungry or after a humble meal, flies from the perfumed chambers of the great; their very wealth filling them with anxieties that banish it from their silken pillows.

THE PREACHER'S LAST WORDS.

IN order to understand the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, it is necessary to glance back at the passages that lead to it. The counsel of the book, throughout, is to enjoy the present, since we do not know what the future may bring. As the will of Providence is hidden from us, too much weighing and planning is unwise. Whether in charity or in business, we must be prepared to leave the result, in many cases, uncertain,—to cast our bread on the waters, as the proverb phrased it; that is, to do things which seem as useless and as thankless as sowing the sea would be. The Turks say, “Do good, though it be thrown on the waters; if the fish don’t come to know of it, God knows.” Be widely generous. “Give a portion to seven, and even to eight,” and thus, though it seem at times thrown-away kindness, it will be found by you again, after many days; for evil may come on you, and your bounty will then bring friends when you most need them. It is true that we never know what is to befall us, but this is no reason why we should do nothing.

“The purposes of God are inexorable; their fulfilment is inevitable, just as the cloud, heavy with rain, must empty itself on the earth, and the tree must fall, and lie, as its leaning, one way or other, has determined. Rain must go before sowing; but if the peasant too critically study the wind, in hopes of the north one, that brings rain, the

time for sowing may pass; and if he watch too keenly in harvest to secure bright, rainless wind, he may lose his crop. We know as little about the winds as about the growth of the unborn child. Therefore be industrious. Sow in the morning, and keep on till night; for you cannot tell whether the morning or the evening work will be the more successful, or whether both may not do well for you.

“Life, after all, is worth living, and the worker has a right to enjoy it; and this enjoyment of it, resting on diligence, and ennobled by the fear of God, is the highest and truest pleasure that we can have; for we must not forget that life passes quickly, and that God wishes us to enjoy it, since the days of darkness in the underworld are many, and, after life, all is nothing, and vanity, the blackness of the kingdom of the dead being all that follows it. Rejoice, therefore, O young man! while you are young, and indulge your heart and eyes as far as is prudent, but take care not to go too far; for God always punishes excess and wrong-doing. Therefore take heed that you do not bring sorrow, or Divine anger, on your heart, or trouble on your health; for both youth and the glory of manhood are, after all, like age itself,—only vanity.

“Remember, then, thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Enjoy them, but do not forget, as thou dost so, that He will reckon with thee if thou abuse them. Enjoy them while as yet the evil days of old age have not come, nor the years approach, of which you will say, that you have no pleasure in them. Rejoice in thy sunny spring and summer, before the autumn brings on the dreary winter, when the storms obscure the sun by day, and the moon

by night, with their veil of clouds, and one dark sky follows another, torrent falling after torrent.

The picture of old age as conceived by the Preacher is now given in a succession of striking images. The body is thought of as a house; but this image is used in connection with the picture of winter storms that has preceded. At the wild uproar of the tempest the keepers of the house, that is, the menials, are terrified, and their masters, the "strong men," crouch in fear,—images which may allude to the trembling of the whole frame as death comes near, weakening every power. The maids at the mill cease their work, when such alarms frighten them off, and the ladies of the family shrink back from the lattices, through which they delighted to look out. Or, it may be, the grinding no longer sounds loud and long, as it did in the days when the household was young and needed much, and they who look out at the lattices are old, and indifferent, and few. Or are the grinders the teeth, and they that look out of the windows the eyes?

The front door, opening on the street, is closed. Is this the mouth, or rather, as the word is dual, the two lips? Those who carry out the figure of a storm think of the doors being closed, to keep out the wind and rain; but this hardly suits the next words—"When the sound of the grinding is low,"—which seems better applicable to the feebler sound of the voice in old age. The nervous weakness of age further shows itself by its starting at the sound of a bird, and by the enfeebled hearing, which almost silences all the sounds of music to it. When men come thus near their end, a slight ascent is a great matter to them, and their helplessness fills them with fear, as they creep along the way. The almond tree, with

its blossoms, first ruddy and then white, is a picture of the snowy head, especially as the almond flourishes in the midst of the winter of Palestine. Even the grasshopper, which in the East lights on every one, in its constant leaps, is a burden now, though it is of no weight, and is off in a moment. Appetite, moreover, fails, so that the caperberry, relied upon to stimulate, gives no power to eat.

No wonder ; for the old man is sinking into his "everlasting house"—literally, "his house of for ever"—and the mourning-men gather near the dwelling, to be ready with their dirge flutes and wails, as soon as the breath has actually ceased ; for they hope they may get the job. They are prowling round, even before the thread of life is broken,—that thread which holds up the tent of our being, as the silver tent-cord keeps up a royal tent, leaving it to collapse on the earth when the cord is loosed from its fastening,—before the fall of the tent brings down and shatters the lamp, filled with golden oil, that hangs from the tent roof. But now a second figure is introduced. Life has been compared to the cord that holds up the tent, and to the lamp that hangs in its midst ; it is now compared to the water-jar, so brittle in the East, being broken at the fountain, and to the water-wheel by which water is raised, being broken at the underground cistern, over which it stood.

Then, says the preacher, shall the dust return to the earth, to become dust once more, and the spirit, or breath, shall return to God, who gave it. One would like to see in these words an indication of belief in immortality ; but the unequivocal language of the third chapter¹ shows

¹ Eccles. iii. 18-21.

that the Preacher left it, at best, an open question, whether the "spirit" of man goes upward, or the "spirit" of the beast goes downward to the earth.¹ No more is meant than that the vital breath of man, resumed again by God, who had made him by it a "living being," or "soul," rises once more to its source, as the speck of cloud melts into the blue at the opening of the day.

Closing his sad reflections, the Preacher sums up all in the repetition of his depressing cry, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Had he looked forward to a life immortal, could he have said so? The portion from the ninth verse is regarded by most to be the writing of another author, not only from the difference in doctrinal teaching, but from its being written in the third person, whereas the Preacher always uses the first. However this may be, the conclusion is full of truest wisdom. "Fear God," says he, "and keep His commandments; for this is the duty of all men. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." In such words, perhaps, we have the voice of a later age, when the kindling light of immortality was shedding a morning twilight of the great truth, before the rise of the Sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ, "brought life and immortality" into full light.

¹ The correct translation of Eccles. iii. 21 is, "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?" See, also, verses 19 and 20, in which man is expressly said to "have no pre-eminence over a beast: for all is vanity."

REFLECTIONS.

THE sweet lessons taught us by the Psalms bring home, among others, the great one, that the doing of good is often ordered, in the moral government of God, as the only reward to be reaped by him who does it. The greatest benefactors of the race have sown the seed of which we reap the golden harvests, and passed silently into the darkness that rounds the little sunlit islet of our life. Who first taught men the use of the plough, or the culture of the grain-crops? By whom were the foundations laid from which have slowly risen, through the ages, the wondrous creations of scientific discovery, in all the immeasurable realms of nature? The present is the child of all the past. As the hut of the Egyptian rises above the sweep of the overflowing Nile waters, by its standing on the dust-mound of innumerable dwellings of his predecessors, who have lived on the same spot, built their poor shelters, finished their day, and long, long ago joined the nameless, forgotten myriads beyond the grave, so we, to-day, enjoy the vantage-ground of civilisation and culture to which our century has risen, through the labour, the genius, and the slow accumulation, millennium after millennium, of whatever its noblest sons have toilsomely brought from the unknown.

To do good, then, is to be, in itself, its exceeding great

reward. No thought of fame or fortune, here or hereafter, is to taint the worth of our motives in anything we propose to do for the honour of God or the good of man. If modest advantage come from our endeavours, let us thank the Eternal, and show our gratitude by our use of His favours; but, in our noblest efforts, let us follow the good and the true for their own sakes, not from any mean and vitiating thought of personal vanity or material profit. Sufficient, that He who sits in the heavens knows all. Even Christ saw of the travail of His soul, only when He had reached the farther side.

The great uncertainty as to the dates of the different psalms, is a strong argument for hesitation in accepting the confident opinions of extreme critics, as to the date of any of them in particular. Some, for example, ascribe the First Psalm to the second century before Christ; others say it is just a little older than the time of Jeremiah; others, that it dates from the next age to that of Solomon. The Second Psalm has been variously pronounced to be by David, by Solomon, by Nathan, Isaiah, Hezekiah, or Alexander Jannæos, who lived eighty years before Christ, while the Twenty-third Psalm has been assigned to David, Jeremiah, the time of Nehemiah, or to the age of the Maccabees. That any one, therefore, however eminent, should speak confidently as to psalm dates, appears to argue self-confidence fully as much as modesty.

The necessity for keeping in mind the Eastern origin of the Bible, and the modes of thought of the ages to which we are indebted for it, is forcibly shown in the study of the Psalms or Prophets. Thus, in the First Psalm, we must not forget the dry and thirsty landscapes, which depend on runlets of water for the greenness of the trees

planted at any point over them. I remember an army surgeon saying to me at one place in Galilee, "How much would you ask, to consent to take a hundred acres here for nothing, if you had to work them?" They were simply a stony desolation; and yet, if water could have been secured, with which to irrigate them, they would doubtless have been rich in their yield. As it is, wherever the night mists reach, it is wonderful how the poorest soil repays labour. And it must not be thought that all Palestine is dependent solely on irrigation. There is, in fact, very little of this, except in gardens and in the orange-groves of the sea-plains. Wide fields at the German colony of Sarona—the same name as "Sharon"—yield richly, with no moisture but the periodical rains, and the beneficent night mists from the sea.

In the Second Psalm it is very instructive to notice the applications of the word "anointed," which, in the Hebrew, is "the Messiah." We find Saul and the other Jewish kings mentioned as God's Messiah; and so, also, is Cyrus, King of Persia. It was a name given, besides, to the High Priests; so that when we say of our Lord that He was the Messiah, we use the word current with the Jews, for those set over the affairs of a kingdom, or of the Church, by the solemn anointing or consecration of God. It is in this sense we use it of Jesus. He was the Christ, or Messiah, or Anointed, of God, over His spiritual kingdom, the Christian Church. The contrast between the Jewish and the Christian ideas of God's Anointed, or, to leave the Hebrew word untranslated, his "Messiah," is vividly shown in the Book of Psalms, which embodies the national conception of successive centuries, and, as the language of the disciples shows, even of the days of our Lord.

The Old Testament "Messiah" is the national hero, who will lead a triumphant war against the powers from whom the nation has suffered. The Prince of Peace, our "Messiah," comes, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.¹ His life among us is the golden noontide of eternal love; His reign is that of righteousness, and peace, and joy of the Holy Ghost. He is the one over whose birth angels rejoiced, in melodious utterances of brotherhood and good-will to men.

The story of Daniel and his companions voluntarily abstaining from the tempting indulgences of the royal table, and contenting themselves with the humble fare of a plain vegetable diet, that they might not do violence to their conscience, is a lesson for old and young in our own day. To dare to do right is noble, especially when, as in the case of Daniel, it costs a real sacrifice of our natural tastes, or a risk to our personal interests. If all of us kept his example in mind, we should forthwith have a mighty revolution in the present order of things. We should no longer hear of "the custom of the trade," or of the "profession," or of the "market." We should no more profess one morality at church and another through the week. Business would no longer mean, as it too often does, the science of taking all possible advantage of one's neighbour in a bargain; and, in regard to such public or private vices, as we might, in any measure, counteract by our example, it would mean, that self-denial for the love of our fellow was the delightful privilege of our lives. In the matter of national temperance, what a change would it soon bring about, if all who feel the horrors of the present reign of drinking habits were to abjure the use of that

¹ Luke ix. 56.

which ruins so many ! Moderation is very well where all are moderate ; but, in our day, when strong drink is a more deadly enemy of the race, " than war, famine, and pestilence united," self-denial is urgently needed. I trust that Mr. Facing-both-Ways will go out of favour. Dare to be a Daniel ! Copy the spirit that said, " Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died ;" " It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." ¹

The recalling to Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamed and forgotten, opens a vision of the relation in which we stand to God, that may well make us thoughtful. We may forget, but He does not ; we may only think, but He knows even the unexpressed thought. The young man tempted to do wrong by apparent secrecy, should remember, that, if man be away, God is near. The fiery furnace has often been kindled since the days of the three Jewish confessors, but the result is always the same. Dare to be true to God and yourself, and you must be more than conqueror ; for even if you suffer to the uttermost that man can do, you keep the citadel of your soul untaken, and, as a valiant servant and soldier of the truth, are a true hero, among the shining multitudes who have been faithful unto death, and are now wearing the crown of eternal life.

The same grand lesson is taught also by the story of the den of lions ; fear God, and you need fear nothing. To those to whom the Book of Daniel was first known, all the lessons of the historical part of it are variations of one moral. " You are under the tyranny of the heathen, and may well fear his wrath, if you rise to strike for

¹ Rom. xiv. 15, 21

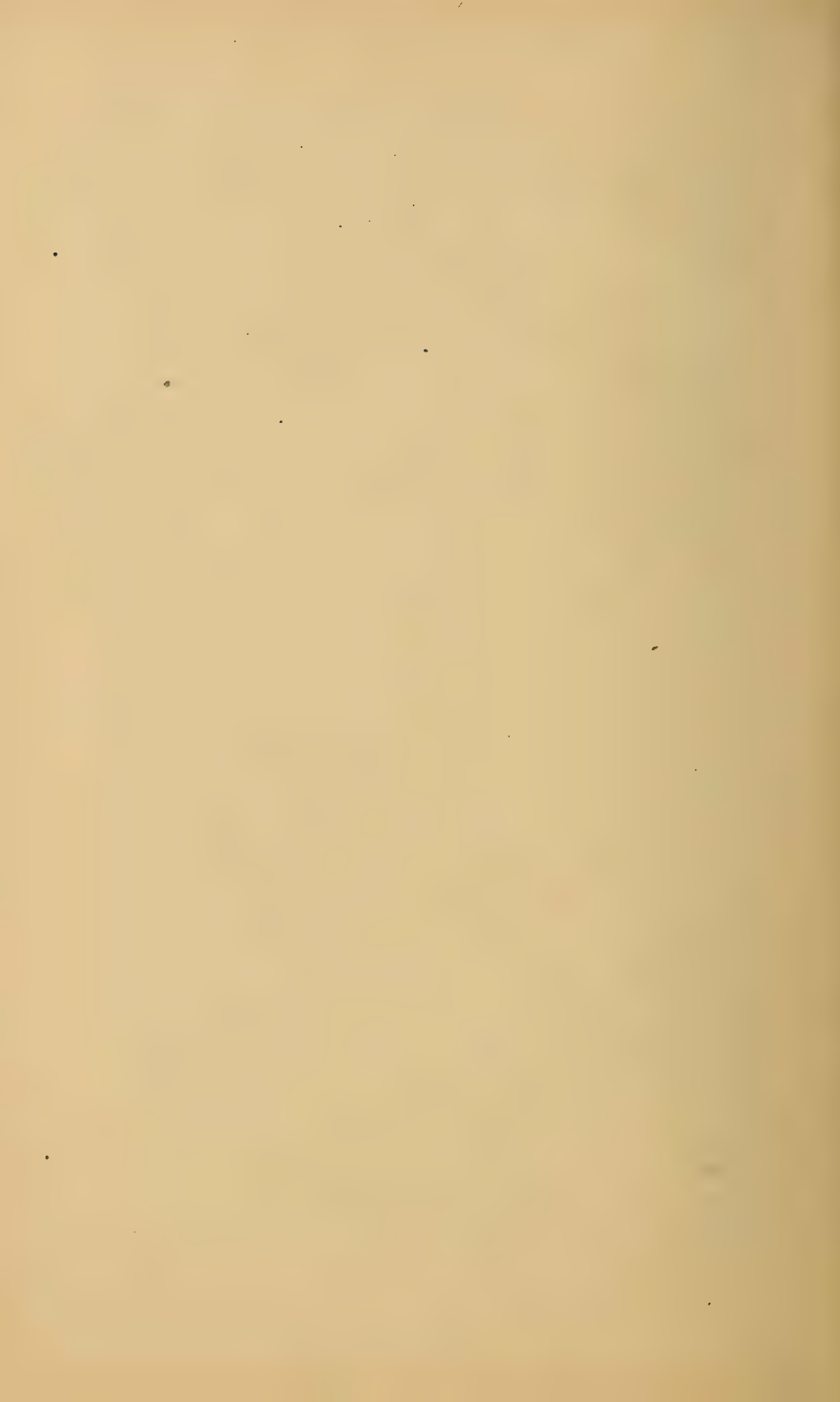
freedom. But be not dismayed. Think of the fidelity of Daniel to the Law, and how God was on his side, even against the mighty Chaldean; and not only guarded him from danger, but crowned him with honour even in Babylon. Think of the three, in the awful fiery furnace! No situation could be more hopeless, apart from God. But did He desert these brave confessors? What is man, O Judah! that thou shouldest fear his power, if thou darest all, for the glory of His great name? He who shut the mouths of the roaring wild beast can protect thee, if thou do thy duty, and rise, for the law and for thy God." No words were more fitted to rouse the nation.

The resurrection of Christ is constantly proclaimed in the New Testament to be the cornerstone of our faith. "If Christ be not risen," says Paul, "then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain." The apostles, we are told, "preached Jesus and the resurrection." It was this, indeed, which gave Christianity its supreme attraction to that age; for the proclamation of a world beyond the present, redressing the inequalities and wrongs of this life, broke over the earth like a trumpet-peal from the Infinite, startling mankind from the despair in which the mysteries of life had sunk them, and fixing its gaze on the hitherto impenetrable heavens, from which, it now seemed, they might momentarily look for the appearance of the Judge of the living and the dead, of whose near approach that trumpet-voice had been the herald.

We know how great an influence the preaching of the near realisation of "the second advent" has, even now; but what must have been the effect on the miserable throngs of domestic slaves of antiquity, or on the mass of human wretchedness that, in those days, filled the alleys

and wynds of cities like Rome, or on the naked and hungry crowds of field-hands and wandering shepherds, whose lives were less regarded than those of the beasts among which they were passed? For, even apart from the light shed over their darkness, by the prospect of a blissful immortality, there was the mighty support of a recognition, by the Eternal Father, of the essential equality of all men, and the proclamation that the only distinctions He acknowledged were those of greater or less moral worth. We need look no further for an explanation of the rapid spread of Christianity.

THE END.



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